



# Minutes

## *TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE*

Minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 1 March 2016, in Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 12.25 pm.

This meeting was webcast. To review the detailed discussions that took place, please see the webcast which can be found at <http://www.buckscc.public-i.tv/>  
The webcasts are retained on this website for 6 months. Recordings of any previous meetings beyond this can be requested (contact: [democracy@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@buckscc.gov.uk))

### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mrs P Birchley (Vice-Chairman), Mr T Butcher, Mr D Carroll (Chairman), Mr W Chapple OBE, Mrs L Clarke OBE, Mrs A Davies and Mr P Gomm

### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Mrs J Austin-Lavery, Ms R Carley, Mr B Ford, Mr A Fowler, Mr M Freestone, Mr N Gibson, Ms G Harding, Mr D Jones, Mr M Phillips, Mr M Shaw, Mrs K Sutherland and Mr W Whyte

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Jean Teesdale.

### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Avril Davies declared an interest for item 6 of the agenda as she was Chair of Beacon Villages Community Library.

### **3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2016 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



There were none.

## **5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

The Chairman reported that Cabinet had accepted seven of the Committee's eight recommendations when he had presented the Flooding Inquiry report on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015. The Chairman also advised that the Committee would shortly be commencing their next Inquiry into Economic Development in Buckinghamshire.

## **6 FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Martin Phillips, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Public Health, Mr David Jones, Library Services Manager and Ms Ruth Page, Project Manager to the meeting. The Library Services Manager took Members through his report on the Strategic Options Appraisal (SOA) that had recently been undertaken to evaluate different options for the future of the Library Service. During this presentation the following main points were noted:

- Libraries had saved £2million from its budget over the past 5-6 years, but needed to save a further £1million. Alternative service delivery methods were being considered to retain the existing library network and range of services, and ensure future sustainability.
- An Assessment Panel had been established and evaluation criteria agreed. Following initial consultation with Stakeholders, including County Councillors, Library staff and Community Libraries, a number of options had been considered against the evaluation criteria.
- Collaboration was dismissed as an option as none of the neighbouring local authorities were in a position to move quickly towards a merger. Although the 19 Community Libraries in Bucks had worked well, it was felt that this model could not be scaled up for the larger, busier libraries. Remodelling the service in-house would not produce sufficient savings and suggestions of outsourcing the service to the private sector raised concerns amongst stakeholders, who felt there could be a conflict between the needs of a commercial operation and the community run libraries.
- The Assessment Panel agreed that the 'Spin Out' option was the best choice. There were precedents for this in other areas and there were options in terms of which legal arrangement to choose, such as a public service mutual (as in Devon) or charitable trust (as in Peterborough or Luton). The service intended to develop a full business case to further explore options, understanding any implications and risks arising and including a robust public consultation exercise. As part of the Budget process an investment pot had been agreed, in the form of a loan, for implementation costs.

The Chairman invited Member's questions and comments. The following main points were noted:

- Libraries should act as community hubs, as they deliver a wider range of services than simply lending books. It was envisaged that Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) would still be able to commission the 'Spin-Out' service to deliver the wider elements of the Library offering. The Library Service had been in discussions with

Marlow Town Council about developing a community hub around their library and in Chesham, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) were considering co-locating in the library.

- Concerns were raised about how easily charitable status could be achieved as the Charities Commission were looking closely at local authority 'Spin Outs'. Members also questioned whether the success of a new organisation might be undermined by the associated redundancy and pensions costs of staff who tumbled over.
- It was noted that a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) option had not been considered viable, as Libraries were not a trading service. A charitable model was the only way to deliver the scale of savings set out in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
- In response to a comment about using library properties more commercially, Members were advised that income generation through property was currently being explored as part of the Cultural Quarter project.
- The Committee's concerns were acknowledged and Members assured that the business case would provide more financial details. By learning lessons from BCC's existing alternative delivery vehicles (ADV) and the experiences of other authorities, it was felt that Library staff and Community Library partners could embrace the opportunities afforded by the 'Spin-Out' option.
- The Cabinet Member reminded Members that his portfolio had already successfully established the Museum Trust and merged the Trading Standards service with Surrey, and was confident that the 'Spin-Out' for the Libraries could be delivered without library closures.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member, Mr David Jones and Ms Ruth Page for attending the meeting and requested that the detailed business case and information on the plans for public consultation should be shared at a future meeting of the Select Committee. It was agreed that the Committee and Governance Adviser would liaise with the Library Services Manager to facilitate this.

**ACTION: Committee and Governance Adviser**

## **7 LOCAL AREA FORUMS - TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Martin Phillips, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Public Health and Ms Rebecca Carley, Locality Services Manager to the meeting. The Cabinet Member reported that he had revised his approach to governance of the Local Area Forums (LAF) and a review of the Terms of Reference had been undertaken, alongside a survey of LAF attendees.

The Locality Services Manager highlighted that this was the first review of the LAFs since 2012. Costings for the meetings had been established at £110,000 per annum, the majority of which was linked to officer time. Attendance at LAF meetings had steadily increased since their introduction in 2008 and comments from attendees raised a variety of issues including operation, agenda focus and the localities budget. It was proposed that the new Terms of Reference (TOR) should apply to all LAFs. The TOR and comments from LAF attendees

would be discussed at a LAF Chairman's meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> April, ahead of a Cabinet Member Decision being taken in May or June.

The Chairman invited Members' comments and the following main points were made:

- The proposed Terms of Reference suggested that the Vice-Chairman would be nominated by the Chairman and confirmed by the Cabinet Member. A Member expressed concerns, as currently at their LAF the Vice-Chairman was nominated by LAF members and the LAF voted to confirm their choice.
- Another Member commented that the proposed Terms of Reference remained rather loose and further clarity was needed around the Terms of Reference and the purpose of the LAFs. On p100, it was stated that an expected outcome of LAFs was that County Councillors would feel better connected to BCC and it was stressed that this should apply to all County Councillors attending, not just the LAF Chairmen.
- It was confirmed that the LAF boundary review would be completed by the end of 2016. A Member suggested that the LAF boundaries should be co-terminus with County Council divisions and the areas covered by Transport for Buckinghamshire's (TfB) Local Area Technicians.
- A Member suggested that as the funding allocated to LAFs had been reduced, the number of meetings could also be cut back. Another suggestion was that the local County Councillor could allocate funding rather than using the LAF structure. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that he wanted the community to allocate the budget, rather than one person. The areas which had run local voting for proposed schemes had seen a lot of community engagement and this should be encouraged. Mr Phillips stated that if individual LAFs wanted to meet twice a year, instead of three or four times, that would be acceptable.
- The Cabinet Member also commented that LAFs were an important mechanism to ensure that BCC could engage effectively with Parish, Town and District councils.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Locality Services Manager for attending the meeting. The Cabinet Member thanked the Committee for their comments which would be fed back to the LAF Chairman's meeting in April.

## **8 DEVOLUTION OF SERVICES**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Mark Shaw, Cabinet Member for Transportation, Ms Gill Harding, Commercial Development Director, TEE, Mrs Jaqueline Austin-Lavery, Business Improvement Senior Officer, TEE and Mr Bradley Ford, Project Officer to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member reported that he was very excited by the devolution of services and officers were investigating alternative arrangements for High Wycombe which was unparished. The Committee were given a presentation which provided an overview of the number of Parish and Town Councils that had agreed to take on services which had traditionally been delivered by BCC (latterly via Transport for Buckinghamshire). During the presentation and in response to subsequent questions from Members, the following main points were noted:

- There had been some historic agreements with Parishes between 2006 and 2012. These had mainly been with Parishes in the south of the county and did not include a fixed range of services or consistent rates of pay.
- In 2015, BCC made a concerted effort to offer a fixed set of services which could be devolved to Parish and Town councils – this was Tranche 1(T1). These services included grass cutting, hedging, weed killing and maintenance of signage. 44 out of 169 Parishes signed up. BCC received positive feedback from the Parishes involved and complaints about grass cutting to BCC's Call Centre fell by 50%.
- Tranche 2(T2) has been introduced for 2016. A further 12 Parishes had already signed agreements to date and more were expected – it was hoped that across T1 and T2, 90 out of 169 Parishes would take on responsibility for devolved services. This would leave 79 Parishes relying on TfB for these services and TfB were currently developing their work programme for 2016-17. The team working on this project had achieved a 90% response rate from Parishes which was very positive.
- The Cabinet Member advised that he had recently written to all Parishes advising that grass cutting would be reduced from six cuts per annum to four, which had prompted further enquiries about devolution.
- Through devolution of these services Parish and Town Councils were able to have more control over how their local area is presented. In some areas, larger Parish or Town councils, provide services for smaller Parishes surrounding them.
- Further devolution opportunities were being explored. A Parish and Town Council conference had been held a few months ago and a number of Parishes had volunteered to undertake pilot projects with BCC.
- A Member asked if funding was allocated with the devolved services and whether this would cover the costs. It was explained that TfB activity and rates had been calculated and the corresponding funding had been passed down to Parishes in T1. In T2, the funding was slightly less due to budget cuts. Some Parishes had found that the budget was sufficient, whilst others were concerned that it was not enough. The funding was protected for the duration of the agreement.
- A Member suggested that it would be useful for County Councillors to know which services had been devolved to Parishes in their area, as this would help with queries from residents. It was agreed that once T2 had been completed a Member Newsletter would be produced to advise Members of the Parishes who had taken on devolved services and what those services were.

**ACTION: Business Improvement Senior Officer, TEE**

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and all the officers for attending the meeting and requested that the Committee should be kept updated of any progress towards further devolution of services.

## **9 COUNTRY PARKS UPDATE**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Warren Whyte, Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment and Mr Andrew Fowler, Head of Country Parks and Green Spaces. The Cabinet Member explained that he had decided to retain the Country Parks as they were an asset to BCC, but

he had set tough commercial challenges for the Parks going forward. Mr Fowler took Members through the highlights of his report and then invited questions. The following main points were noted:

- The income target for the Parks was increasing from £85,000 per annum to £157,000 per annum in just two years' time. This would coincide with the end of the Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) which currently funded a gardener post, adding a further £25,000 of pressure.
- Visitor numbers were increasing by approximately 6% year on year, Go Ape attracted a lot of visitors to both their Adult and Junior high rope courses and the car parks at both Langley Park and Black Park were being extended to accommodate more visitors at peak times. A lease for a café at Denham Country Park had been agreed and the operator had secured funding for a new play area, as well as improvements to the café. In November 2015, BCC held its first Hackathon to produce business ideas for the Country Parks and two, a Park Live App and Holiday lodges/Treehouses, have been chosen to have full business cases developed.
- The Head of Country Parks and Green Spaces acknowledged that whilst the Parks had progressed, there was a need for a more formal commercial plan, as well as further customer insight, through engagement with users of the parks and also those who have not been before.
- The Parks were vulnerable to wet weather, but a Visitor's Centre to perhaps include function rooms or all-weather activities, would require planning permission and as the Parks lie in an area of green belt, this could be contentious.
- The Country Parks team would be restructured to ensure it would comply with BCC's Future Shape programme and to enable the commercial growth needed to meet the stretch targets within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
- Members voiced some concerns as to whether the new income targets could be achieved and suggested a number of different ideas to boost visitor numbers including Glamping/TeePees with hot tubs, Open-Air Classical Concerts and organising bus trips from Aylesbury and the North of the County for walking groups to visit the parks for the day.
- The Cabinet Member was asked if the complex land ownership of the Parks which had been discussed at Select Committee last year had been resolved. In response, he explained that he had investigated this, but felt that it would be very costly to unpick and it was not strictly necessary at this time.
- A Member asked if there were any parks in the North of the County but the Cabinet Member advised that there were not any BCC owned parks, although there was green space in Quarrendon which was managed by the Bucks Conservation Trust. He also commented that BCC needed to consider how Green Park in Aston Clinton could be used more widely.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and the Head of Country Parks and Green Spaces for attending the meeting. The Committee congratulated the Country Parks team on their achievements to date and wished them luck with working towards their future targets.

## **10 TEE REVIEW OF THE FIRST YEAR**

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

**11 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2015 at 10am in Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury. There will be a pre-meeting for Committee Members only at 9.30am.

**CHAIRMAN**