

Improvement and Review Commission Minutes

Date: 13 November 2013

Time: 7.00 - 8.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs J D Langley (in the Chair)

Councillors K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, D H G Barnes, I Bates, D J Carroll,
Mrs L M Clarke OBE, G C Hall, A E Hill, Ms P L Lee, Mrs M L Neudecker, J A Savage,
A Slater and T Snaith

Standing Deputies: Councillors D A Anson MBE and D M Watson

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Angell, A Hussain JP and
Mrs W J Mallen

Also present: Councillors R M H Farmer (Chairman of the Sports / Leisure Centre
Task and Finish Group), J M Gibbs (Cabinet Member for Community)
and A D Collingwood (observer).

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

20. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was noted that the three standing deputy Members present at the last meeting;
Councillors R M H Farmer, Ms R Knight & D M Watson, had been omitted from the
minutes.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the
Improvement & Review Commission held on 4
September 2013 be approved as a true record and
signed by the Chairman, subject to the insertion of
the three omitted standing deputies as above.

21. PRESENTATION BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY

The Cabinet Member for Community was welcomed to the meeting along with the
Head of Community. The Cabinet Member referred to his report appended to the
agenda which set out the work implemented and planned within his portfolio in
respect of Housing, Community and Localism.

The Cabinet Member outlined some headline figures in that people in temporary
accommodation in the District, which at this time last year had been 87, was 60 as

at 2.30pm that afternoon, the current number of people in Bed and Breakfast accommodation was 2. Wycombe aspired to the gold standard in respect of housing, part of which was the elimination of the usage of bed and breakfast accommodation.

A close watch was being kept on the various welfare reforms which impacted on the service, whilst close liaison with Red Kite Community Housing and all Registered Social Landlords was being effected. The Cabinet Member expressed that he was keen to utilise the Section 106 monies set aside for affordable housing.

In respect of the Community, Leisure and Localism aspects of the portfolio's work, the Member highlighted the planned move of the museum to the Queen Victoria Road buildings, the current negotiations in respect of the Reggie Goves Centre transfer, the transfer of Castlefield Community Centre to the Karima Foundation and the development of the Bellfield Community House.

The positive crime reduction figures announced by the Community Safety Partnership were referred to, along with the successful transfer of various woodlands to the ranger service staff mutual. An important announcement in respect of the award of the contract to run the Council's 3 x sports centres was imminent, whilst a new 15 year lease in respect of the Swan Theatre, hopefully without need for subsidy, was being negotiated. Upgrades to the Oak Room and the 'Old' Town Hall as a whole were referred to.

Members made the following points and received clarification on a number of queries as follows:

- The possibility of operating a money making HMO (Houses in Multiple Occupation) licencing scheme which would additionally improve standards was discussed;
- The planned optional conference centre usage of the 'Old' Town Hall was explained;
- Options regarding the use of the vacated Castle Hill House site after the move of the museum were discussed;
- Members were informed of the on-going review into the Wycombe Resource Zone, an invaluable asset to the District;
- The Cabinet Member agreed to supply Commission Members full details of the Disability Facilities Grants made over the last year;
- A softening on the stance of the Swan Theatre management to of its contribution to charity collections was referred to; and
- The Cabinet Member was congratulated by a Commission Member on the continued success of the Choice Based lettings scheme.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and the Head of Community for their informative presentation.

22. TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON UNITARY GOVERNMENT FOR BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

The Meeting recalled that at its last meeting on 4 September 2013 it had been agreed that a task and finish group be established to examine the possibility of Unitary Authorities for the Buckinghamshire area, and a report be presented to the this meeting of the Commission to consider proposed terms of reference and membership of the Group.

The report outlined the background to unitary government both on a local (Buckinghamshire) basis and nationally. Unitary government for Buckinghamshire had been explored previously, most recently in 1996 and 2006. Nationally, the Government's position was not to instigate or impose changes, but would back proposals from local authorities to shares services and to integrate their services with other local providers.

In undertaking the review, the Commission was asked to consider the key issues of:

- Should the review be Joint Scrutiny with other Buckinghamshire authorities or a Wycombe District review only?
- Were one or more unitary authorities for Buckinghamshire being considered?
- The depth of the Scrutiny review?

The report outlined two options:

- Option 1- A joint scrutiny into Unitary Government for Buckinghamshire, or
- Option 2 - A Wycombe only externally focussed scrutiny review,

These were discussed at length along with the proposed membership formulas regarding each of the two options.

The following points emerged from the discussion:

- Given that unitary status would affect the whole County if implemented (in whatever form) scrutiny should be carried out jointly involving all Buckinghamshire Authorities;
- The review should look at unitary government, which would include the one unitary and two or more unitary councils options;

- The current lack of Central Government drive for change to unitary status was noted;
- The initiation of scrutiny into unitary status by Aylesbury Vale District Council and the need for Wycombe to work alongside or be involved in their work in a joint scrutiny initiative;
- The need to remain in touch with the local community and any loss of democracy at a grass roots level by any move to unitary status was to be considered as part of the review;
- Joint scrutiny with other authorities should be on the basis of shared costs;
- If for some reason the other authorities did not participate in a joint scrutiny review, or progress was limited, then the Commission would need to consider option 2 above. The Commission asked that progress be reviewed every three to four months; and
- Any Wycombe District Council membership of a joint scrutiny body must be on a cross party basis.

RESOLVED: That

- (i) a joint Task and Finish Group into the examination of unitary status for Buckinghamshire authorities (option 1) be pursued with the other local authorities of Buckinghamshire, with a report back to the Commission's meeting on 15 January, 2014; and
- (ii) The approach to the other councils be on the basis of:
 - (a) membership being on a cross party basis and of a manageable size;
 - (b) costs of the review being shared between the councils on a formula to be agreed

23. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE SPORTS / LEISURE CENTRE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Commission received an update report from Councillor R M H Farmer (Chairman of the Group) on the work of the re-convened Sports and Leisure Centre Task and Finish Group.

Members recalled that the Group had been re-convened at the Commission's 4 September 2013 meeting on the basis of scrutiny of a number of issues contained in the risk register for this project.

The Group, with a slightly different membership from its 2012 guise, had met once on 14 October 2013. The Council's Major Project and Property Executive, Community Commissioning Manager, Head of Finance & Commercial Services and Head of Planning & Sustainability had attended this meeting along with representatives of Mace, the developers appointed by the Council in respect of the project.

The Task and Finish Group had discussed the identified issues and risks at length. The Group then considered the project risk register in more detail at the meeting and noted that there had been changes to the status of some risks. However these constituted 'improvements' to risks (i.e. moving toward amber or green) rather than additional risks being added or moving toward red.

In respect of the traffic issue Members remained concerned about some aspects of the traffic model and the potential for increased congestion around the site area, whilst noting that this had been addressed as part of the planning application process. Any changes to this model would require a revised planning application. The Task and Finish Group was clear that it did not wish to delay the project but wished to understand the traffic situation more clearly. Buckinghamshire County Council traffic officers had therefore been invited to provide additional information on the traffic model and implementation to a future meeting of the Group.

Given the current 'call in' of the Buckinghamshire County Council Individual Cabinet Member decision in respect of the outstanding routing of the Daws Lea link aspect of the Southern Quadrant Transport Plan, County Highways Officers would be unable to make this presentation until the conclusion of this 'call in'. This would be considered at a future meeting (scheduled for January 2014)

RESOLVED: That the update report of the Sports and Leisure Centre at Handy Cross Task and Finish Group be noted.

24. REVISED WYCOMBE DISTRICT SCRUTINY GUIDE

The Meeting noted the recently revised Wycombe District Scrutiny Guide. The Commission considered the document to be a useful summary of Scrutiny at the Council. Its inclusion on the Council's website, intranet and extranets was commended along with the Commission Member Work Programme suggestion form appended to the revised guide. The guide would be updated at periodic intervals.

25. COMMISSION'S WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

The meeting identified the Affordable Housing Provision (use of Section 106 Funds) item on the Cabinet Forward Plan for specific consideration ahead of Cabinet consideration in February 2014. It was requested that a report be brought to the next meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission on this matter.

Members noted that the Joint Waste Contract Task and Finish Group (with Chiltern DC) was still regularly convening, a meeting was to be scheduled soon. Additionally it was noted that given one of the original Wycombe representatives, Councillor W Bendyshe Brown, had come off of the Group, given his appointment to a Deputy Cabinet Member role here at Wycombe, a gap in the Wycombe representation on this Group existed. The Commission meeting agreed that Councillor D H G Barnes fill this gap.

The Commission's attention was specifically drawn to the work programme suggestion form, which enabled Members to submit suggestions for Task and Finish Groups in the future. The current list of suggested topics was also submitted for information. Currently the Commission had its full quota of Task and Finish Groups.

RESOLVED: (i) That the Commission's work programme be noted;

(ii) That the item scheduled for Cabinet on 10 February 2014 on affordable housing be previewed at the Commission's meeting on 15 January, 2014; and

(iii) That Councillor D Barnes be appointed to the joint Waste Task and Finish Group, in place of Councillor B Bendyshe-Brown.

26. COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

There were no Councillor Calls for Action.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Peter Druce	- Democratic Services
Elaine Jewell	- Head of Community
Charles Meakings	- Head of Democratic, Legal and Policy Services