

Improvement and Review Commission Minutes

Date: 2 April 2014

Time: 7.00 - 8.10 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, A E Hill, Mrs W J Mallen, J A Savage and T Snaith

Standing Deputies: Councillors D A Anson MBE and R Farmer

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G C Hall, Ms P L Lee,
Mrs M L Neudecker and A Slater

Also present: Councillor N B Marshall (Cabinet Member for Planning &
Sustainability)

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

38. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement and Review Commission held on 15 January 2014 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

39. PRESENTATION BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Cabinet Member for Planning & Sustainability outlined the work currently being carried out under the Portfolio; the main areas highlighted being the New Local Plan, current projects, CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) and decision-making within both Building Control and Development Management.

He emphasised the need in respect of sustainability issues to work with the County NEP (Natural Environment Partnership) and other biodiversity initiatives. The NEP working alongside; rather than conflicting with, the work of the LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership).

In respect of the New Local Plan the duty to co-operate with neighbouring authorities, given the absence of any regional plan, was seen as key. In this regard

some agreement had been reached in the last week with both Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils and possibly with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead on cross border working on housing issues.

It was confirmed that good performance in decision making across the service existed, utilised bench marking and sharing of good practice with other authorities.

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

- Mitigation in respect of HS2 (High Speed 2) was an important part of the work of the Service. Though only 700 to 800 yards of the planned line crossed the District, the visual impact of one of the tunnels was considerable; additionally construction traffic movements were of concern. A report to Cabinet, and to Council, requesting permission to petition the Government was currently being worked on to cover the District Council concerns (suitably tied in with BCC and neighbouring authorities' petitions).
- In respect of efficiencies and savings it was confirmed that there were no planned staff -redundancies in the Service this year.
- It was acknowledged that improvements to Frogmoor were well overdue and plans were being brought forward as soon as possible.
- It was confirmed that the planned Westbourne Street link around the west of the town centre with its 'slow and steady' flow design would not add to emissions / pollution levels, though of course if traffic as a whole increased, these levels would inevitably increase too.
- Councillor Marshall confirmed that there was no central government edict that green belt must be built on, merely a requirement that a review of green belt should occur under the New Local Plan process – with recognition that this review may lead to land being released for development.
- Data that indicated traffic levels overall in the District were less than 2003 was to be shared with Members.

The issues related to highway matters on planning applications were acknowledged, and that there were no easy solutions to resolve these.

Councillor A Slater, who had been unable to make the meeting, had forwarded a number of written questions to the Cabinet Member via the Chairman; these were responded to by Cllr Marshall as follows:

- In respect of comments made by Buckinghamshire County Council as the responsible highways authority regards planning applications before Wycombe District Council, the Cabinet Member acknowledged that there was no reason to question the currency and validity of data utilised by BCC. Councillor Marshall did confirm that he was disappointed by the quality of BCC input in respect of Highways issues in some cases, whether due to staff

resource problems or not, and was seeking to address this with the County Council as far as possible..

- It was acknowledged that MVAS's (Moveable Speed Indicator Devices) were a useful tool in identifying traffic issues, however the data gleaned from the use of such devices did not attain the requisite level for use in properly constituted traffic studies to inform highways authority conclusions. NAG's (Neighbourhood Action Groups) were entitled to submit comments on any planning application by means of the planning portal, letter etc. A NAG could also utilise the public speaking session at planning committee and any extension of time required to accommodate this was at the behest of the Planning Committee Chairman.
- 15% of CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funds would be available to the appropriate Parish or Town Council to spend, increasing to 25% in parishes/town where a Neighbourhood Plan had been submitted and agreed. In respect of the un-parished High Wycombe Town area, the suggested spending of these funds would be by means of High Wycombe Town Committee recommendation to Cabinet. It was confirmed that funds could be spent across wards within the High Wycombe Town area, i.e. all 'town' funds would be pooled.

The Cabinet Member was thanked for his comprehensive presentation on the work of the Planning & Sustainability Portfolio.

40. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE JOINT WASTE CONTRACT

The Commission had before it an extensive report outlining the implementation of the Joint Waste Contract inclusive of details of the scrutiny of the Contract to date.

It was confirmed that the Joint Task and Finish Group would not now meet for its originally scheduled final late April meeting as its work had been concluded. It had added much value to the roll out of the Joint Waste Contract. It was confirmed that the current recycling rate of 54% across the two Districts compared very well with pre joint contract levels.

Members were assured that a tight control would still be administered on all waste issues by means of the Joint Waste Committee of which all Buckinghamshire Authorities had Member representation. This was ensuring the smooth interworking between collecting authorities and the disposing/recycling authority (County) along with the Joint Waste Collection Committee which oversaw the Wycombe/Chiltern Serco contract.

The inclusion of a number of recycling performance indicators amongst those referred to the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of the Audit Committee and Improvement & Review Commission at their quarterly Performance Indicator Analysis Meeting was noted. It was agreed that details of complaints received and

relevant responses in respect of the contract would similarly be referred to that meeting.

It was suggested and agreed that a 6 month review on the timescale of any joint Task and Finish Group involving Wycombe District Council's Commission Members be introduced, similar to internal Wycombe only Task and Finish Groups. An exception would have to be agreed by the Commission to extend beyond this limit, as was sometimes required, as per the successful Joint Waste Task and Finish Group and other similar major initiatives.

RESOLVED: That:

(i) the work undertaken by the Joint Task & Finish Group scrutiny of the joint waste, recycling and street cleansing contract be noted;

(ii) the work of the Joint Task and Finish Group has been completed as the contract has been successfully let and is operating:

(iii) the Joint Waste Collection Committee should now monitor the performance of the contract and seek service improvements be noted: and

(iv) a six month review on the operation of any joint Task and Finish Groups involving Wycombe District Council Commission Members be implemented.

41. COMMISSION'S WORK PROGRAMME AND CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Commission had before it their current work programme and the Cabinet Forward Plan. Additionally details of the existing Task and Finish Groups along with the previously suggested topics for consideration by Task and Finish Group were listed.

In respect of the existing New Local Plan Task and Finish Group it was suggested and agreed, that following on from the earlier presentation by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainability, 'Sustainability' and recommendations as to how the Council wishes to achieve such be weaved into the work of the Group and included in its final report when presented to the Commission and hence Cabinet.

In respect of the choice of a further Task and Finish Group from the four previously suggested topics, the most popular, and agreed by consensus, was the review of the current operation of the Council's policy towards houses in multiple occupation.

The operation of a licensing policy for such houses in Reading Borough was referred to and the invaluable contribution this made towards the cost of public services utilised by both tenants and landlords at these properties.

Councillors Barnes, Bates, Hill, Mrs Mallen and Snaith all indicated their willingness to serve on this Task and Finish Group. A request for further Commission Members who were not at the Meeting would be issued. A scoping report would be brought to the next Commission meeting in respect of this review.

The Meeting did not identify any additional issues from the Cabinet Forward Plan for specific scrutiny and noted the work programme of the Commission as appended.

RESOLVED: That:

- (i) No topics from the Cabinet Forward Plan currently require review by the Commission;
- (ii) The Scrutiny Work Programme be noted; and
- (iii) A Task and Finish Group in respect of a review of the current operation of the Council's policy towards houses in multiple occupation, be established.

42. INFORMATION SHEETS

The following Information Sheet had been issued since the last meeting of the Commission:

- 1/2014 Further Updates to Environment Portfolio Presentation at Commission Meeting 15 January 2014.

No questions had been received from Members in respect of this document.

43. COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

No Councillor Calls for Action had been received.

44. CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

The Chairman noted that this would be last meeting of the Commission that she would be chairing, in that a new chairman was to be proposed at Annual Council.

Councillor Mrs Langley thanked all Members for their invaluable contribution to Scrutiny, by means of the Commission, during her Chairmanship. In response Members remarked on her tireless input into the work of the Commission and her

much appreciated business-like approach to chairing the Meetings. The Chairman then received a round of applause.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

- Peter Druce - Democratic Services
- Charles Meakings - Head of Democratic, Legal and Policy Services
- Penelope Tollitt - Head of Planning & Sustainability