

Improvement and Review Commission Minutes

Date: 22 June 2015

Time: 7.00 - 8.16 pm

PRESENT: Councillor R Gaffney (in the Chair)

Councillors Mrs S Adoh, K Ahmed, A Baughan, Mrs S Brown, H Bull, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, A D Collingwood, M P Davy, C Etholen, M Harris, M E Knight, D Knights, A Lee, S K Raja, R Raja and J A Savage.

Standing Deputy: Councillor L Wood

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms C J Oliver

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission held on 11 March 2015, be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed all Members to the first meeting of the Commission, and pointed out that Councillors Khalil Ahmed, Matt Knight, John Savage and himself were the only returning Members. As a result, for the benefit of all the new Members, he spent some time outlining in brief the role, functions etc. of the Improvement and Review Commission.

4. INDUCTION PRESENTATION ABOUT THE IMPROVEMENT & REVIEW COMMISSION

The Council's Head of Democratic, Legal & Policy Services initially outlined the two major roles of the Commission;

- Improvement (input before Cabinet take a decision); and
- Review (scrutiny of Cabinet decisions including 'Call-In').

The Council has a scrutiny role by statute, which is discharged at Wycombe District Council through the Improvement and Review Commission.

The relationship of the Commission with the Cabinet was explained along with the limitation of the Commission's powers in that they could not be used to review or challenge / scrutinise non-executive matters (e.g. Planning Committee decisions, staffing).

The requirement of Cabinet to consider all Commission recommendations and give reasons for rejection, if such occurred, in the Cabinet minutes, was outlined. Over the last three years of 66 recommendations made to Cabinet only 8 had been rejected and examples of the "added-value" work of the Commission were outlined.

The review of issues affecting the District was permitted and successful reviews had been undertaken in the past e.g. review of urgent health care.

The 'exceptional' nature of 'Call-ins' was explained along with the statutory process followed. 'Call-ins' effectively 'froze' Cabinet or Individual Cabinet Member decisions, until considered by the Commission and, if appropriate Cabinet. Call-ins could not be utilised for non-executive matters (e.g. planning and licensing applications), neither could they be used for Cabinet recommendations to Full Council.

The five scheduled Commission meetings were outlined along with how issues were brought to these meetings, including identifying items for consideration from the Cabinet Forward Plan, as well as from individual Members by requesting items for inclusion in the Commission's work programme. In respect of the Task and Finish Groups set up to examine issues in detail; the three to six month timescale and their membership and size was explained.

The detailed Scrutiny Guide and the Improvement & Review Protocol (the latter featured in the Council Constitution) appended to the agenda were referenced as the key governance documents to the work of the Commission at Wycombe District Council.

Members raised a number of issues and received clarification on a number of queries as follows:

- The Councillor Call for Action facility had not been invoked at Wycombe District Council. This legislation was the means by which ward members could raise ward matters with the Commission on which they were making no progress with the relevant public bodies as a 'last resort'. Here at Wycombe it was believe that good practice had prevent the need for such;

- The procedure in respect of valid 'call-ins' was explained, with the Commission deciding initially whether to debate. Then, if debated, whether recommendations to amend the decision were appropriate, whether the original decision should remain as was, or if further information and an adjournment of the 'call-in' was required;
- The prerogative of the Cabinet to decide whether Commission recommendations whether they be in respect of a 'call in' or any other matter be accepted or not, was outlined;
- The demarcation between Cabinet / Cabinet Member responsibility for Planning Policy (which could be scrutinised) and Planning Applications the remit of the Planning Committee (which could not) was explained; and
- The necessity of 'scoping' the work of a Task and Finish Group (usually at the first meeting of the Group), to prevent too big a topic being taken on with few real effective specific recommendations as a result, was emphasised.

5. WORK PROGRAMME TOPICS FOR IMPROVEMENT & REVIEW COMMISSION

The Commission was asked to determine its work programme for the coming year and had before it the various suggestions that had been made for the creation of task and finish groups.

Local Plan Task and Finish Group

The on-going work of the Local Plan Task and Finish Group was considered, with updated terms of reference. A change was proposed to the terms of reference so that the Task and Finish Group could test the case for a Saunderton Area Action Plan, to include public engagement. This was agreed.

Councillor John Savage had agreed to chair the Local Plan Task and Finish Group, which was endorsed by the Commission. A briefing for the Task and Finish Group was envisaged for August, ahead of commencing work in in September.

The role of Local Members on the Saunderton specific work of the Local Plan Task and Finish Group was outlined. Their presence at such meetings as important witnesses to give evidence, shape a view point etc. was explained rather than as Group Members actually formulating recommendations.

Budget Task and Finish Group

The proposed work of the Budget Task and Finish Group was also outlined, which for this year work would be undertaken in two distinct phases. Last year the conventional Budget Task and Finish Group meetings scheduled around Christmas had proved problematic with the exceedingly late indication of Central Government settlements to Local Authorities. This year an initial phase would start now, looking at issues for consideration in the drawing up of next year's budget, making recommendations to Cabinet in November. A second phase from November to February next year would look at the emerging Council budget as a whole, reporting to Cabinet at its February meeting.

Councillor Collingwood (Vice Chairman of the Commission) had been approached to Chair the Group. This appointment was endorsed by the Commission.

Saunderton Lodge

In respect of the proposed task and finish group regards the review of Saunderton Lodge Temporary Accommodation it was noted that a report on proposals was scheduled to go to Cabinet on 21 September 2015. In order that the Commission could have input it was proposed that rather than setting up a Task and Finish Group, a report could be brought to the Commission meeting of 16 September 2015, just before the Cabinet Meeting, so that the Commission could make any recommendations on the issue alongside the report to Cabinet for consideration. The appropriate Cabinet Member and lead officers would be invited to the Commission's 16 September meeting.

Ward Member role in Planning

This suggestion of a review of Ward Members and Officer Roles in planning process and planning enforcement was seen by Members as problematic as a review subject, given that it strayed into non-executive matters i.e. the work of the planning committee / the local planning authority. The Planning Portfolio Advisory Group was seen as a more appropriate forum for this review.

Volunteers from the Commission to serve on the Local Plan and Budget Task and Finish Groups were encouraged to approach the relevant Chairmen. Similarly Chairmen would approach Members they saw as skilled in respect of the Tasks involved, to join their Groups. The opportunity of Members not on the Commission (as long as they were not Members of the Executive (Cabinet Members or Deputies) to serve on these Groups was noted.

Cabinet Forward Plan

The Commission asked for the Corporate Plan item to come to its November meeting, ahead of consideration by Cabinet, if considered necessary following the Members seminar in October.

RESOLVED: That (i) the Local Plan Task and Finish Group be established, under the Chairmanship of Councillor John Savage (Vice-Chairman Councillor Alex Collingwood), with the

terms of reference as set out, subject to testing the case for a Saunderton Area Action Plan, with public engagement, as outlined above;

(ii) the Budget Task and Finish Group be established, under the Chairmanship of Councillor Alex Collingwood to start its initial phase of two planned pieces of work, as outlined above;

(iii) the issue of the Review of Saunderton Lodge be dealt with by means of a report to the Commission's 16 September 2015 meeting ahead of Cabinet consideration later that month, as outlined above;

(iv) the issue of the Review of Ward Members and Officer Roles in planning process and planning enforcement be referred to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainability for consideration for review with the Planning Portfolio Advisory Group rather than by Task and Finish Group; and

(v) The Corporate Plan be submitted to the Commission's November meeting, if considered necessary following the Members Seminar in October.

6. RESPONSES TO THE URGENT HEALTH CARE REVIEW

The Commission considered the report which outlined the steps being taken in respect of the recommendations of the Commission's Urgent Health Care Report.

In Buckinghamshire, health scrutiny is normally conducted as a joint activity with Buckinghamshire County Council through the Health and Adult Social care Select Committee. The Select Committee had been kept informed throughout the review and it was agreed that the responses to the Commission's recommendations should be reported to that Committee as well. The Select Committee had met on 24 March 2015 at which the responses to the recommendations, from the appropriate providers were considered.

These responses were now featured in this report before the Commission.

Members noted that the Commission's recommendations have been accepted and work had commenced on progressing them accordingly. When the Select Committee considered the response in March it was clarified that the Minor Injuries

and Illness Unit now had 24 hour X-ray provision. Similarly the Select Committee had received timescales for the improved IT integration, and effectiveness of communications to improve patient understanding of urgent care pathways / services.

Members felt that a further review of progress in respect of the recommendations would be helpful, in the spirit of positive joint working that the Commission and health providers had developed during the review. It was agreed that this should be organised for the 16 September 2015 Meeting, with health providers being invited to update the Commission. The issue of the e transfer of records / data to Wexham Park Hospital when emergency cases were referred there, was highlighted to also be explored.

RESOLVED: That a report updating the Commission on progress regards the recommendations of its Urgent Health Care Review, including how service improvements were being measured, be brought to the 16th September 2015 meeting, with appropriate Service Providers invited to attend and give their input.

7. 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
Charles Meakings - Head of Democratic, Legal and Policy Services