

Improvement and Review Commission Minutes

Date: 9 November 2016

Time: 7.00 - 8.15 pm

PRESENT: Councillor R Gaffney (in the Chair)

Councillors Mrs S Adoh, K Ahmed, H Bull, A D Collingwood, C Etholen, M Harris, A E Hill, M E Knight, Ms C J Oliver, R Raja and J A Savage, H L McCarthy

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Miss S Brown, Mrs L M Clarke OBE and D Knights.

Observer: Councillor M Hanif.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

20. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission held on 18 October 2016, be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman, with the correction that Councillor C Etholen's apologies had been received but had been omitted in error.

21. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REGENERATION DELIVERY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Commission had before it the report of the Regeneration Delivery Task and Finish Group featuring some 12 recommendations for consideration for onward referral to Cabinet.

Chairman of the Regeneration Delivery Task and Finish Group: Councillor Alex Collingwood guided members through the Report.

The Regeneration Delivery Task and Finish Group had been set up by the Improvement & Review Commission on 11 November 2015 with the following Terms of Reference being established at the Commission's 13 January 2016 meeting:

To investigate and help shape the emerging arrangements for the delivery of the Council's Regeneration and Infrastructure priority in order that the Council can make the smooth transition to financial self-sufficiency, specifically focusing on:

- (a) The prioritised regeneration programme to deliver the scale of recurring annual income required by 2018;
- (b) The organisational resources, decision-making and project delivery arrangements in place to ensure delivery of the regeneration projects on time and on budget; and
- (c) The partnership arrangements in place to ensure delivery of the regeneration projects on time and on budget, in particular with Buckinghamshire County Council and the Bucks (Thames Valley) Local Enterprise Partnership.

Divided into the three themes of Transportation, Economics and Community the recommendations of the Group along with the reasons for the recommendations were outlined as follows:

Transportation Theme

That Cabinet be recommended:

- a) To further engage with Buckinghamshire County Council (as the Highway Authority) and the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership in respect of the problems of getting commuters / deliveries / visitors on and off of the Cressex Industrial Estate.

Reason for this Recommendation

This was a major barrier to commerce and the attraction of further quality 'blue chip' companies. The need of Wycombe District Council to meaningfully engage with BCC (as the Highway authority) on this issue and effect improvements was noted. A report to be brought back to the Improvement & Review Commission within 6 months on progress.

Within any implementation of these works, the Task and Finish Group encouraged Highways Officers and Planners here at WDC (Wycombe District Council) to investigate a much needed specified HGV (Heavy Goods Vehicle) parking site at or around the Cressex area. This could be included in any major re-modelling of roads, to relieve the considerable current parking of HGV's in residential areas and possibly provide a sizeable income stream.

- b) To similarly engage with Buckinghamshire County Council in respect of work to solve Globe Park / Westhorpe Junction (Marlow) entrance / exit problems.

Reason for this Recommendation

As with Cressex Business Park, easing congestion on these important business sites in the Wycombe District was seen as key to the vibrancy of these commercial hubs.

Economic Theme

- c)** For new businesses for Estates to be able to help with a specified time to offer either a rent free period and or be able to offer rate relief of anything between 25% and 80% rate relief for a specific period of time.

Reason for this Recommendation

This would provide a valuable offer to small new businesses to ensure they have a good start. It might also be one of the reasons for a small company to stay rather than move away, or indeed fold in the first year.

- d)** To ensure continued liaison and proactive dialogue between Planning & the Council's Major Projects Team.

Reason for this Recommendation

This co-operation was seen as key, the need for the Planning Service's engagement with the Council's Commercial section on a progressive communicative basis (as with all applicants) was essential to ensure successful fruition of the Council's Major Projects and Estates team's planned projects. A suitable sized dedicated Planning Team to be in place.

- e)** To ensure that pre-worked up infrastructure plans / economic regeneration initiatives for Wycombe District were ready to submit to Central Government via the Local Enterprise Partnership in respect of each funding bid series.

Reason for this Recommendation

Well-scoped viable initiatives ready to insert in to each funding bid series would increase the likelihood of securing valuable regeneration funding for the District. Opportunities for such joint funding not being missed.

- f)** To involve Members and particularly local ward members at the embryonic stage of any regeneration scheme e.g. as schemes were worked up for inclusion in Buckinghamshire Infrastructure Investment Plan (i.e. LEP 'bid-ready' schemes), and similarly re WDC only prototype schemes.

Reason for this Recommendation

The involvement, were possible, of local members was seen as invaluable to regeneration, that local knowledge could well prove crucial. The support of these members could well influence successful implementation.

- g)** To continually monitor the commercial expertise available to the Major Projects & Estates team, and to expand / contract appropriately as and when major new projects initiated / completed.

Reason for this Recommendation

The ability of the Major Projects and Estates team to respond to opportunities was seen as key to delivery of the major revenue streams by the Council's commercial activity envisaged.

- h)** To consider the establishment of an appropriate delivery model as and when each residential provision scheme is initiated, on a case by case basis.

Reason for this Recommendation

The Task and Finish Group had identified that Delivery Vehicles could well be an efficient and effective way of regeneration by the Council particularly in respect of housing / residential schemes, Commercial opportunities were currently well served by the in-house set up.

- i)** To set up a £50K concepts fund to enable swift employment of consultants / architects etc. to consider schemes for viability prior to any major investment.

Reason for this Recommendation

Task and Finish Group members noted the officers' concerns that current in-house resources were not always quickly accessible to explore the various ideas presented. The proposed fund would ensure no such viable concepts were missed. The Group felt that schemes / projects assessed under this provision should proceed if a minimum 6% return was estimated or valid community reasons were established.

- j)** To explore further the plans / proposed scheme for the Old Brunel Engine Shed at the High Wycombe Railway Station.

Reason for this Recommendation

This site represented a key 'gateway' to the town for visitors arriving by Rail, a smart effective scheme epitomising the 'ready for business' feel of the District would speak volumes. This type of project was exactly the kind the Commercial team thrived on and the Group were confident they could repeatedly deliver.

- k)** To support plan of future projects in the region of £20m* and remain aware of the conflict between future capital requirements and commercial schemes.

(*Officers to look into the required further regeneration fund required for the next three years and apply appropriately to Cabinet, the £2m presently included in above £20m having been fully allocated for utilisation).

Reason for this Recommendation

The Group supported the major projects schemes outlined by the Commercial Team and presented at the various Task and Finish Group meetings; Cabinet in prioritising budgets should ensure that the commercial side, with its ability to secure considerable revenue, should not lose out.

Communities Theme

- l)** To encourage the Buckinghamshire / Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership to implement the available Up-Skilling programmes for residents, in particular wards, where required.

Reason for this Recommendation

Bucks Business First (an arm of the Local Enterprise Partnership) provided these programmes which would prove invaluable to equipping residents with the key skills needed by local employers.

- m)** To seek what skills are required by holding an annual business meeting to seek business input to Regeneration and upskilling.

Reason for this recommendation

Informing the Business Community on plans of major updating of roads, important changes to funding, seek support on things WDC wish to see done for the regeneration, or be told such is not required? We need businesses to inform WDC of requirements, as we are not truly aware of the requirement ourselves.

Members raised a number of points and received clarification on the following issues:

- Members noted the provision of a dedicated planning officer in respect of the Council's regeneration schemes; the Council was now, for the first time, receiving the same level of Planning Support as outside developers did.
- No recommendation had been made in respect of opening up of the River Wye, the Group having felt that this would be too lengthy to effect, too expensive and too difficult. However an update that flood culverts under the town centre may need updating which would be a major piece of infrastructure work which in itself could provide an opportunity for the opening of the river was noted.
- The recent new commercial additions to the Town Centre of the Fox Brewery and the imminent Works restaurant both with Wycombe District Council as freeholder were commended.
- The important role of the Commission and the like of this Task and Finish Group in exploring possible regeneration schemes and acting as a sounding board for proposed developments by the Council was explained.

- The programming in of feedback from Cabinet on these recommendations as to their implementation, rejection or amendment was clarified.

The Chairman commended the work of the Group and noted the 8 meetings / visits that had taken place. The recommendations were put to the Commission for onward referral to Cabinet at the forthcoming Cabinet meeting of the following Monday 14 November 2016, the Commission and Group Chairman to present such at that meeting. The recommendations were agreed unanimously by the Commission.

RESOLVED: That the recommendations of the Regeneration Delivery Task and Finish Group as featured above lettered **a to m**, along with the featured 'reasons for recommendations' be referred to the Cabinet meeting of 14 November 2016, unamended.

22. REPORT OF THE BUDGET TASK AND FINISH GROUP STAGE 1

The Commission then considered the report of the Budget Task and Finish Group in respect of its first phase of work that of formulating recommendations for inclusion in the 2017-18 Budget. The Report featuring some 8 recommendations, for consideration for onward referral to Cabinet.

Chairman of the Budget Task and Finish Group: Councillor Alex Collingwood guided members through the Report.

The annual Budget Task and Finish Group had been set up by the Improvement & Review Commission on 13 June 2016 to be carried out in two stages as per the previous year, with reports to Cabinet In November for the input of recommendations for consideration for inclusion in the evolving 2017-18 budget (this Report), then again in February with recommendations as a result of the scrutiny of the proposed budget.

The recommendations of this Frist Phase along with the 'Reasons for the Recommendations' featured in the Report were outlined:

1. In respect of Business Rates; Members supported the suggestion submitted by officers via the consultations; that Central Government retain a top slice of the overall national funding to cover all appeal losses. Cabinet to re-iterate this submission.

Reason for Recommendation.

To minimise each local authority's risk.

2. The Group encouraged the Cabinet member to pursue Central Government to make the final decision in respect of all outstanding aspects of funding as

soon as possible, so that the financial landscape could be established and the 2017-18 Budget worked on and finalised.

Reason for Recommendation.

For prompt resolution of the 2017-18 Budget.

3. To lobby Central Government in respect of the storing up of planning permissions by developers, which further increased the value of their landholdings with attached permission, waiting to develop at the highest house prices.

Reason for Recommendation.

All these counted against the actual delivery of housing units and the collection of attached CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) and Section 106 monies.

4. To use contingency funds to cover shortfall in Planning Service income.

Reason for Recommendation.

The Group had concerns regarding the shortfall in Planning Service income in respect of Service Delivery and in particular delivery of the Local Plan.

5. To transfer costs from the general council tax payer to the user in respect of green waste and car parking. These to be explored in the Second Phase of the Budget Task & Finish Group's work.

Reason for Recommendation.

The Green Waste & Car Parking services were seen as overdue for a review of charges.

Further income being possible in respect of Car Park users from outside the District with care having to be exercised that this was not at further expense to the residents.

The imposition of green waste charges as imposed by many other authorities was seen as a 'quick win' in respect of increased income.

6. (in reference to 5 above) The dynamics of on street / off street parking to perhaps be looked at in a future Commission / Task and Finish Group work or as part of the Second Phase of the Budget Task & Finish Group's work.

7. To consider the wider budgetary implications of the Business Rates Revaluation and the intention to reflect this in the 17-18 budget and MTFP (Medium Term Financial Plan).

Reason for Recommendation.

The influence on the Council's Budget position of Business Rates Revaluation and the repercussions of any settlements in respect of such, was considerable.

8. To reset the anticipated savings since stock transfer featured in previous Budgets in respect of the Housing Service for 2017-18 and to re-cost the entire homelessness budget.

Reason for Recommendation.

These savings anticipated had not been achieved, a realistic approach in respect to the 2017-18 Housing Budget to be adopted.

Task & Finish Group members were concerned about increasing pressure on the housing budget related to possible forthcoming legislation and a ruling on HMOs, both which may mean another budget reset or virement would be required.

The Group chairman outlined that recommendations 1 – 4 and 7 & 8 were those for inclusion in the Budget for Cabinet's immediate consideration, whilst recommendations 5 & 6 were to be re-visited by the Group in its Stage 2 work.

Members raised a number of points and received clarification on the following issues:

- Members expressed concerns re the possible implementation of green waste charges. The introduction of such may lead to diversion to landfill or fly-tipping rather than paying any fee. It was suggested and agreed that the wording in respect of this recommendation (5) be amended to investigate such charges only.
- It was noted that the majority view of the Commission Meeting was that Green Waste Charges were not acceptable.
- The renewal of the Joint Waste Contract three years hence was seen as a suitable time for implementation of such major changes should they be agreed.
- The reputational damage that could follow such a charge implementation was discussed.
- The need in any such investigations to establish and understand how income was generated and calculated was noted.

The Chairman again commended the work of the Group, the recommendations were put to the Commission for onward referral to Cabinet at the forthcoming Cabinet meeting of the following Monday 14 November 2016, with the amendment in respect of investigation of Green Waste Charges re recommendation 5. Again it

was noted that the Commission and Group Chairman were to present the recommendations to the Cabinet meeting.

RESOLVED: That the recommendations of the Budget Task and Finish Group (Phase 1) as featured above **numbered 1 to 8** along with the featured 'reasons for recommendations' be referred to the Cabinet meeting of 14 November 2016, with the following re-written Recommendation 5: 'The transfer of costs from the general council tax payer to the user in respect of green waste and car parking to be investigated. These to be explored in the Second Phase of the Budget Task & Finish Group's work'.

The reasons for recommendation in respect of Recommendation 5 being re-written as follows:

'The Green Waste & Car Parking services were seen as suitable for a review of charges.

In respect of the Green Waste aspect of the Waste Contract analysis of how the contract was constructed along with how income was generated and calculated was seen as essential in this work.

Further income being possible in respect of Car Park users from outside the District with care having to be exercised that this was not at further expense to the residents.'

23. COMMISSION'S WORK PROGRAMME AND CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The status of the current task and finish groups was considered and discussed.

The need for the **Local Plan Task and Finish Group** to re-convene ahead of the referral of the final Local Plan to Cabinet (which would probably occur in March 2017) was noted, probably meeting on two occasions: for consideration of the Consultation and of the Actual Plan.

The Chairman of the **Rural Issues Task and Finish Group**; Councillor C Etholen confirmed that the Group had held its final meeting just prior to the Commission meeting that very evening. Final recommendations had been agreed and the full report of the Group would feature on the agenda for the Commission's 11 January 2017 meeting as planned.

The continuing work of the **Budget Task and Finish Group** in respect of its Phase 2 work 'scrutiny of emerging budget' had been outlined in the earlier Budget Task and Finish Group item.

Members were encouraged to complete the Work Programme Suggestion Form appended to the agenda (Appendix C) in respect of items they wished to suggest for consideration by the Commission or a Task and Finish Group.

No topics were identified on the attached Cabinet Forward Plan for review by the Commission at future meetings.

RESOLVED: That the update on the Work Programme and current task and finish groups be noted.

24. COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

There were 'Councillor Calls for Action' for consideration.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

Peter Druce - Democratic Services
Catherine - Head of Democratic, Legal & Policy.
Whitehead