

# Improvement and Review Commission Minutes

Date: 21 June 2017

Time: 7.00 - 9.00 pm

**PRESENT:** Councillor R Gaffney (in the Chair)

Councillors K Ahmed, M C Appleyard, H Bull, A D Collingwood, A E Hill, M E Knight, Ms C J Oliver, R Raja, J A Savage and R Wilson

Standing Deputies: Councillors M Hussain JP and H L McCarthy

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Miss S Brown, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, C Etholen, A Hussain, Mrs W J Mallen, R Newman and C Whitehead and invited guest Councillor D Knights (Deputy Cabinet Member for HR, ICT & Customer Services).

**Also present:** Councillor D A Johncock (Cabinet Member for Planning), Councillor L Wood (Cabinet Member for HR, ICT & Customer Services) and Mr D Overall (Member of High Wycombe Society and 'Revive the Wye' Partnership).

## 1. ONE MINUTE'S SILENCE

The Meeting held one minute's silence in respect of the victims of the recent Grenfell Tower tragedy.

## 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

## 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement and Review Commission held on 1 March 2017, be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

## 4. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chairman welcomed the two new members of the Commission present; Councillors Appleyard and Wilson, and hoped they would enjoy their work with the Commission. He remarked that they would certainly bring a wealth of knowledge and insight to the scrutiny carried out by the Commission.

The Chairman advised the Commission that he had, as a follow up to previous work done by the Commission, requested an Information Sheet to be issued prior to the next Commission meeting, in respect of updates on the two housing issues of House in Multiple Occupation legislation and the future plans for Saunderton Lodge.

## **5. ICT STRATEGY IMPROVEMENT & REVIEW WORK**

The Chairman reminded the meeting that, as it stood, subsequent to the last Commission meeting, the ICT (Information Communication Technology) Task and Finish Group was due to meet again. However Task and Finish Group Chairman; Councillor L Wood had since left the Group and had been appointed as Cabinet Member for HR, ICT and Customer Services.

The Chairman remarked that he was delighted with this appointment and so as to keep the Commission updated on the development of ICT across the Council, the new Cabinet Member had been invited to this Meeting to outline to Members the progress made in respect of the new Strategy.

Councillor L Wood the Cabinet Member then thanked the Commission for its previous and continued input into the Strategy Development, he remarked that his Policy Advisory Group for HR & ICT included many of the Task and Finish Group Members involved in the earlier Scrutiny work. He hoped to return as a regular feature on Commission agendas to keep members updated on the Strategy's development.

A broad set of upgrades to ICT provision for both staff and Members was underway with completion by the end of the summer. Microsoft 2013 was being installed, to then be followed by 2016 and ultimately 365. RSA cryptosystem software tokens were to be launched, internet access to be upgraded along with VDU (Visual Display Unit) replacement. Telephony upgrades were being worked on, with an aspiration to move to Skype thereafter.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that there was limited funding, but it was not just a case of cost benefits but resultant operational efficiencies. The importance of the impending termination of support of some of the current systems was discussed and acknowledged.

The hardware refresh to officers was being rolled out first, to be followed for Members. The latter would not be mandatory; Members would not be obligated to return current hardware or cease using their own.

The ICT Strategy effectively included a commitment to go digital by default, this was to be the primary means of communication with customers. However care was to be taken that the traditional means of communication remained open to those not computer literate, if not enhanced. 'Digital by default' involved a considerable number of strands of work, of which the ICT Strategy was only one.

All the above work was currently being processed by the PAG (Policy Advisory Group) a planned report was to be submitted to Cabinet in November, the Cabinet Member intended to bring this to the Commission in September before the Cabinet's consideration.

John McMillan (Head of HR, ICT and Customer Services) attended in support of Councillor Wood, the Commission noted and appreciated John's contribution on all IT & HR matters.

**RESOLVED:** That (i) the update from the Cabinet Member for HR, ICT and Customer Services in respect of the evolving ICT (Information Communication Technology) Strategy be noted; and;

(ii) a report be brought back to the September Commission meeting in respect of the Draft ICT Strategy before its submission to Cabinet in November 2017.

## **6. UPDATE ON TRANSPORT ISSUES CRESSEX AND WESTHORPE**

John Callaghan (Team Leader – Transport & Environment) was welcomed to the Meeting.

Mr Callaghan outlined that the traffic movements in respect of Cressex and the Westhorpe interchange at Marlow were perennial issues, hence their inclusion in the recommendations of the Commission's previous Regeneration Delivery Task and Finish Group and the Commission's request for this update.

Members raised a series of points and received clarification on a number of queries.

In respect of Cressex:

- The possibility of allowing left turns at least for cars and light vehicles was being considered from Coronation Road into Cressex Road. Provision of a separate left turn lane either here or at the junction of Lancaster road with Desborough Avenue would require road widening and involve land take, and a great deal more expense.
- Consideration of a road utilising the current footpath route between Halifax Road and Chairborough Road would greatly increase and change the nature of traffic in Chairborough Road which was a residential area.
- The Handy Cross Traffic Management Task and Finish Group proposed back in January of this year would not necessarily prove a means of resolving these Cressex traffic problems. It was considered that Handy Cross be reconsidered as a possible subject for Scrutiny after 6 months with a caveat that it may be returned to sooner if it is deemed to tie in with the

County Council growth agenda as a transportation piece. County Council being considered an important partner in this Scrutiny when first proposed.

- Councillor David Johncock, Cabinet Member for Planning re-iterated that these issues were well known to County Councillors, he and his team here at Wycombe District Council were working well with County to resolve these issues, he would certainly report back on any major problems encountered.

In respect of Westhorpe:

- The Westhorpe junction was a key junction in respect of accessing both the town of Marlow and the Globe Park Business Park. It was of concern to Wycombe District Council but not its responsibility. The Planning Member and his Service were using all their influence to resolve matters, CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) being a major tool in such.
- Discussions were underway with the Local Enterprise Partnership, the County Council and Highways England in respect of:
  - Possible signals;
  - A dedicated slipway into Globe Park; and
  - The development of more innovative and/or wide ranging solutions that considered the interaction of several of the closely spaced junctions onto the A4155.
- Members noted that the introduction of signals did not necessarily relieve the problems, in fact they could worsen the situation.
- Part time signals might be an option that could be considered. These appear to be used elsewhere in the country.
- The importance of the Wiltshire Road roundabout further along the road into Marlow and its input into the traffic equation at Westhorpe was acknowledged.

**RESOLVED:** That the update from Team Leader (Transport & Environment) in respect of Cressex and the Westhorpe junction be noted.

## **7. COMMISSION'S WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN**

The Commission considered the work programme report featured along with the appended Cabinet Forward Plan and Commission Work Programme.

In respect of the featured Task and Finish Groups the following was noted:

## **Local Plan Task and Finish Group**

The Meeting was updated in respect of the new local plan by the Cabinet Member for Planning, who indicated that a formal notice in respect of the Plan was due to be published in the next couple of weeks.

Councillor Johncock requested that the Local Plan Task and Finish Group be convened to consider the Plan one last time, before the Plan's referral to Cabinet probably on 18 September 2017.

This meeting of the Task and Finish Group represented a final opportunity for Scrutiny Members to look at the Plan and alert the Cabinet to any concerns or queries, it was hoped with all the work from officers across the Service and the considerable previous input by Commission Members this would be a final crossing of 't's and dotting of 'i's exercise.

It was planned that an informative paper on the recommendations from this meeting of the Local Plan Task and Finish Group included in the report to Cabinet 18 September 2017 was to be brought to the Commission Meeting just before Cabinet; currently scheduled for 13 September 2017.

## **Handy Cross Traffic Management Task and Finish Group**

See notes under Update on Transport Issues Cressex and Westhorpe minute.

## **Budget Task and Finish Group**

The Commission Chairman reminded the meeting on the successful operation of this important Task and Finish Group in previous years. Councillor Roger Wilson a new member to the Commission, but a much experienced ex- Cabinet member in a number of portfolios, had agreed to Chair this Group this year around.

Councillor Alex Collingwood; Group Chairman last year had kindly agreed to serve as Vice Chairman this time around. Councillors Rafiq Raja and Matt Knight agreed to serve as per last year. Further volunteers to come forward before the Group work begins.

The intention was to carry out the Budget Scrutiny in two phases as per the previous two years. An initial phase to start in late summer in respect of recommendations for inclusion in the budget and a second phase from December in respect of scrutiny of the emerging budget.

It was noted that formal responses of Cabinet to the phase two recommendations of last year's Budget Task and Finish Group had not yet been received and were not yet scheduled before Cabinet.

In respect of proposed new review topics and specifically the work programme suggestion form submitted by Councillor H McCarthy in respect of the **Return of the River Wye to the Town Centre**, this matter was discussed at length.

Councillor McCarthy outlined that he was not an engineer so from that angle he was not sure whether the uncovering of the Wye could be done, yet it had featured in the master-plan for the town centre way back in 2002. There would be an inordinate amount of work involved, but there was planned digging up under the next scheduled and funded master-plan work, could the river uncovering work not be done at the same time? To do so now would be expensive but in 20 years' time it would be at least 10 times more.

There were ways of finding external funding, the Environment Agency were supportive; funding was available from Landfill taxes. The River was both an environmental and economic key to the town, its uncovering would make High Wycombe much more a destination town, not just a town visited out of necessity. There was, as said, a practicability to doing the work all in one go.

The proposed Task and Finish Group could look at funding options as well as these practicalities.

Councillor Johncock (Cabinet Member for Planning) confirmed that the uncovering of the river was not in the current Town Centre Master-plan works being rolled out, the funding was not currently there. It would cost at least £2m, such was difficult to justify to taxpayers as the benefits could not be quantified easily in monetary terms. The Task and Finish Group if established could look into such issues, establishing the breadth of support.

Mr M Overall (Wycombe Society and 'Revive the Wye' Partnership member) was invited to speak. He outlined the outstanding work the Partnership had done in respect of the River up and down stream, but the one major aspect of the Partnership's work still outstanding, was its culverting and absence from the Town Centre.

Previous 'Return of the River' events held in 2014 including a talk at the Guildhall by Charles Rangeley-Wilson author of the 'Silt Road – The Story of a Lost River' about the River Wye, had shown an appetite for the exploratory work the proposed Task and Finish Group could deliver.

Members raised a number of issues in respect of public consultation; the lost opportunity at the time of the construction of Eden and the benefits of the River Kennet navigation landscaping in Reading town centre.

It was unanimously agreed to set up a Task and Finish Group to investigate the return of the River Wye to the Town Centre; Councillor McCarthy accepted the Commission Chairman's invitation to Chair the Group.

Volunteers to be established over the next few weeks with scoping of the work on the Group to be carried out by Members and relevant officers thereafter.

In respect of the Appended Improvement & Review Commission Work Programme (appendix C) Members were asked to note the Review of Corporate Plan Objectives scheduled to be considered by the Commission at its next Meeting on 13 September 2017. This important input from the Council's Scrutiny body was

needed before referral of the Objectives to Cabinet and thence Council. To enable this a rescheduling of the Commission's September meeting may be required, Members will be kept abreast of any such rescheduling if needed.

Members were encouraged to complete the Work Programme Suggestion Form appended to the agenda (Appendix B) in respect of items they wished to suggest for consideration by the Commission in future.

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.

## 8. COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

There were no 'Councillor Calls for Action'.

Members noted the next scheduled meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission; **Wednesday 13 September 2017 7pm.**

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Chairman

### **The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:**

John Callaghan	- Team Leader (Transport and Environment)
Peter Druce	- Democratic Services
John McMillan	- Head of HR, ICT & Customer Services
Catherine Whitehead	- Head of Democratic, Legal & Policy.