

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2013 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. London (Chairman) (Chairman)

Cllr. Brown (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Butler, Clark, Cooke, Mrs. Davison, Edwards-Winsor, Eyre, Fittock, Gaywood, Maskell, Mrs. Morris, Mrs. Purves and Raikes

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr. Mrs. Bracken

Cllrs. Mrs. Clark, Fleming, Ms. Lowe, Mrs. Parkin, Piper and Miss. Stack were also present.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

2. Role of In Depth Scrutiny

The Head of Information and Customer Services brought Members' attention to the updated version of the 'A Guide to In Depth Scrutiny' booklet. He would be liaising with Democratic Services on providing an external trainer for the meeting in September 2013.

Action 1: Training to be provided at the meeting in September 2013.

The Chairman broadly read the terms of reference, highlighting the powers to the committee with the caveat that there was a finite resource with regards to Member's and Officer's time. The Vice Chairman advised that he and the Chairman had received additional guidance from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

Action 2: The Head of Legal and Democratic Services to circulate the guidance to all Members of the Committee.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

With the Committee's consent, the Chairman took item 4 'Work Plan' before item 3 'In Depth Scrutiny – Establishment of a Member Parking Working Group'.

3. Work Plan

The Chairman advised that there was the capacity for up to four in depth scrutiny reviews and asked for views and ideas. The following ideas were mooted:

- Roads – state of repair in district
- Economic regeneration
- Leisure services

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- Social housing – housing benefit changes
- Planning and environment issues: changes in planning legislation.

It was agreed that where possible duplication of work other committees may be doing should not occur, but this did not preclude scrutiny of any work later on.

The Vice Chairman advised that the previous Services Select Committee had carried out an in depth scrutiny on Universal Credit, it was agreed therefore that an update may be more appropriate. A Member suggested that analysis of performance indicators would help highlight areas of concern and help identify areas for scrutiny. The Chairman stated that areas may become apparent when questioning the Portfolio Holders. The Vice Chairman advised that from the next meeting, each meeting would receive an A4 sheet listing red indicators.

Resolved: That after Parking, a Budget working group be set up at the next meeting, with Leisure Services as the third working group later on. Highways and Housing to remain on the list of possible areas.

Members considered possible external invitees. The Chief Executive of Sencio was suggested. A Member suggested speaking to current partners and potential partners such as Parish and Town Councils.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman advised that this would be an evolving process and encouraged Members to contact them outside of the meeting with any further ideas.

4. In Depth Scrutiny - Establishment of a Member Parking Working Group

Members considered a report proposing to establish a Working Group to consider issues relating to the provision and management of on and off street parking and parking enforcement, as requested by the Chairman and Vice Chairman.

The Committee commented on an article that had appeared in the Sevenoaks Courier that day which unfortunately reported that the working group would be formed to look at increasing parking charges to make up budget shortfalls and would be headed up by the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Community Development. A Member was keen to clarify that the group was not being set up to provide evidence to the Portfolio Holder to increase parking charges.

Resolved: That

- a) an in depth scrutiny Members' working group be set up to consider issues relating to the provision and management of on and off street parking and parking enforcement in the district; and
- b) that the group consist of the following Members: Cllrs Clark, Cooke, Edwards-Winsor, Eyre, Mrs Purves and Raikes (Chairman).

5. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Performance

The Chairman welcomed the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Performance, who gave a brief run down of the areas within his remit and challenges

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faced. He explained how funding was changing from grant to reward based and the challenges it posed. He wanted to look at the way services were delivered and what the community needed, more prudential borrowing and investing in assets with greater returns in order to support and sustain services going forward. Economic Development was a key driver; how could the Council become more commercial in certain areas and generate income; working with residents to deliver on higher expectation yet less funding; cloud computing; the paperless office; the use of physical equipment eg. staff using their own, were all ideas to be investigated.

After the presentation Members asked questions of the Portfolio Holder. In response he replied that what kept him awake at night was considering ways to get the Council out of a situation that was not of it's own making. However he believed that within local government there was an abundance of creativity which could be seen by the scale of savings already made, but a question of balancing this with the constant needs and wants of the residents the Council served. A priority over the coming year would be building a sustainable financial future, which may involve changing the typical local government view of risk. He had no way of predicting what the Council would be like in twelve months let alone five years, as the pace of change was so fast. Outsourcing would limit control and potentially be pricier, whilst not ruled out he would prefer to look elsewhere within the public sector. He believed the Council needed to aim for complete self sufficiency and get to a position where it was not reliant on any future government. A creative use of assets could be one way. There was a question of the need for the County Council when it no longer had much power with regards to education and no longer had the necessary funding for highways. He believed services needed to be delivered at the best possible layer, but there currently was no appetite for opening up a unitary debate. Fundamentally services had not changed much over the years and perhaps it was time to start from a blank page with what residents expected/felt they needed. Assumptions within the ten year budget needed revisiting. Working with the Strategy and Performance Advisory Committee he would produce a strategy document which would be sent to all the Advisory Committees.

The Chairman thanked the Leader on behalf of the Committee.

6. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety

The Chairman welcomed the new Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety, and gave a [powerpoint presentation](#) of the areas within her remit and challenges faced. She explained that many duties were statutory so all that could be investigated was carrying them out as cost effectively as possible.

A number of questions were posed that required detailed responses and it was agreed that this be made an action point. In response to other questions she undertook to feedback to the Advisory Committee's working group on CCTV the question of whether the whole of the Christmas period required cover; and whether there a need for CCTV at all, when it was not a statutory duty. Air quality monitoring was an area that was a statutory duty and the Advisory Committee would be looking at the possibility of doing the barest minimum required.

Action 3: That the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety reply by return to the following questions after the meeting:

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1. *Costings of Benefit fraud investigations*
2. *When the last was check made on Hackney Carriages, was it done on notice.*
3. *CCTV – data on number of incidents early afternoons as opposed to the evenings and where it was most effective.*
4. *Cost of Licence service*
5. *Procedure with regards to food hygiene/number of inspections*
6. *Whether there were powers to enforce commercial properties to clear unsightly areas*
7. *Resource implications for the Licensing Section of the implementation of the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013.*

The Chairman encouraged Members to contact him or the Vice Chairman with any other observations or ideas.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.00 PM

CHAIRMAN