

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 26 March 2015

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.58pm.

***81 Public Speaking**

There were no public speakers for this section of the meeting.

***82 Minutes**

The minutes of the 26 February 2015 were agreed, subject to the insertion of the specific Sidmouth Wards that Councillors Mrs Frances Newth, Peter Sullivan, and Stuart Hughes represent.

***83 Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Jill Elson – minute number 86

Personal interest

Reason: Chairman of Exmouth and District Community Transport Group - Parishes Together Fund awarded funding towards providing a new bus.

***84 The Jurassic Coast and Tourism**

The Chairman welcomed Sally King from the Jurassic Coast team to the meeting, as well as one of their Ambassadors, Alderman Mike Green.

She outlined, through her [presentation](#), the size and scale of the World Heritage Site and what it represented in terms of the earth's geological history. She reminded the committee of the role of the team to inspire, celebrate and safeguard the site.

Sally King focussed on the Marine Link project, which has currently been put on hold on request of the Devon and Dorset county councils due to lack of funding. She took members through how the project had evolved, including extensive background studies and an independent peer review of the project. Benefits of a marine link were:

- Best means of viewing the World Heritage Site;
- Sustainable form of transport that could ease congestion in peak season;
- Useful for residents;
- Attractive to tourists and encourage a wider visit to more of the district;
- In promoting and increasing tourism, benefit tourism related jobs.

Councillor Sheila Kerridge spoke about her role as Member Champion for Tourism, highlighting the lack of funding in past years to actively promote tourism by the Council. She commended the work of individual towns and enterprises in undertaking their own promotion, but felt it was time to look at how to promote the area as a tourist destination as a whole, and bring the individual pieces together to work as one in attracting more footfall to the area. She was disappointed in the decision at County level not to continue to work and fund the Marine Link and hoped that, in time, this concept could be reviewed and revived by other means of funding.

The Leader advised that the transport board of the LEP should be approached to see if some funding was available to support the Marine Link as a means of easing transport issues in the summer months around the coast.

Debate on the issue also included:

- Consider a “bed tax” at a small rate, as common in European countries, to help fund the Marine Link;
- A contribution was already being made by the District to the benefit of tourism indirectly through the Countryside service and the parks and gardens in the area;
- As marine links were successful and profitable elsewhere in the country, encouragement should be made to local enterprises to take up the marine link project to bring to fruition;
- Current signage at Exeter Airport arrivals was heavily tailored to advertising the county, despite it being in the district of East Devon. As the arrivals hall was due to refurbishment, the airport should be approached to get more advertising for the more local area and the Jurassic Coast.

The Chairman thanked Sally King and Mike Green for attending and the committee showed their appreciation by a round of applause.

RESOLVED

that future work of the committee is added to the forward plan to look specifically at:

- a) How council assets and their associated events are currently promoted;
- b) How that can be improved within the boundaries of the existing budget and staff, including a form of cross marketing that pulls together assets and events that may fall across different services and portfolios;
- c) How Members can help promote, through their work with the electorate, the council assets and events.

85 Joint think tank recommendations

The Portfolio Holder – Corporate Business outlined the latest recommendations following a think tank held on the 30 March. Members had discussed at that think tank changes to the committee structure and other constitutional amendments.

In outline, the recommendations covered separating the existing Overview and Scrutiny Committee into two committees: a Scrutiny Committee; and a Corporate Overview Committee. The recommendations also included separating out the two functions of the current Development Management Committee into separate committees, one undertaking the determination of applications, the second covering planning policy.

The Democratic Services Officer asked the committee to be mindful of the resource implications of recommending additional committees. More meetings would impact on the resources of the Democratic Services Team, Legal Team, and a number of lead officers in attending additional meetings. Mileage claims from members themselves would also increase and impact on the budget.

The committee was also asked to bear in mind the impact on an applicant if a planning application was deferred for site inspection to a month later, rather than the current ten days to Planning Inspections Committee.

Members discussed the proposed recommendations, including debate on:

- Moving back to area committees for determining planning applications because of the workload;
- No ability to call in a planning application if it was felt that the decision was not in the best interests, particularly when going against officer recommendation;

- A joint meeting of the proposed Overview Committee and Scrutiny Committee would have to be held to recommend a draft budget each year;
- Support for an opposition chairman for the scrutiny functions;
- Practicalities of the Development Management Committee undertaking a site visit prior to considering and determination of an application, as is undertaken at County level;
- Combine the proposed Corporate Overview Committee and the proposed Strategic Planning Committee in light of advice of expected workload and to help minimise impact on staff resource;
- Current Planning Inspections Committee often operating at too small a number in relation to the scale and impact of the decisions they have to take;
- Informal site visits by Development Management Committee should continue to be encouraged but training on how to go about that should be part of the member development programme;
- Members who visit a site should be the members to vote on the application;
- Quorum for PIC currently too low;
- Attendance records are a means of keeping the electorate informed of attendance and would be part of changes in technology, not a dedicated “clocking on” system as some members may have assumed;
- Economic planning policy had been lacking in past years and could be addressed through the work of a strategic committee;
- Additional meetings for any committee could be held if felt necessary;
- Call in should be easier to instigate;
- Some site visits were difficult to undertake because of the size of the building where only 3 councillors could view at a time – if all 16 members of the DMC undertook that exercise it would protract site visits as well as impact on the practical issues of getting both the committee and officers to the site.

RECOMMENDED

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be replaced by two committees, one of which is a Scrutiny Committee set up on the following terms:
 - a. 15 members, with a quorum of 5, excluding members of the Cabinet;
 - b. meeting on a regular basis to feed into the Cabinet cycle of meetings, on average 10 meetings per year;
 - c. principally owning the post decision scrutiny process and scrutinise service delivery;
 - d. the opposition would be invited to nominate the Chair of the Committee – if no suitable nomination is made, the Leader would retain the right to nominate the Chair.
2. That the function of overview from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and the function of planning policy from the Development Management Committee, become the responsibility of a new Overview, Economic and Planning Policy Committee, set up on the following terms:
 - a. 11 members, with a quorum of 5, which could include members of the Cabinet subject to legal clarification;
 - b. Meeting six times per year and as required;
 - c. Include in the terms of reference the principle role of developing policy and evaluating its implementation, including planning policy and economic development policy;
 - d. Chaired by a member of the majority party.

3. Development Management Committee terms of reference be amended to reflect that it will solely focus on the determination of planning applications, retaining the current membership of 16 but with an amended quorum of 8.
4. Development Management Committee, when deferring an application for a site visit, name 9 members of its committee to undertake a site inspection, along with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of that committee (making a total of 11) to undertake that site visit 10 days after the meeting and meet to determine that application on that same day. Substitute members will be arranged as necessary and a quorum of 8 is required.
5. that the Vice-Chairman of Development Management Committee take on the role of Chairman when an application within the Chairman's ward is determined;
6. that training/awareness of the planning delegation scheme be reinforced through the Member Development programme;
7. The call-in process to be amended to permit any four members of the Council (excluding cabinet members) to support a call-in, along with the support of the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the proposed Scrutiny Committee;
8. that finding a suitable system for recording Councillor attendance at committee meetings, of which they are a member, and length of attendance, form part of a wider project associated with providing improved digital infrastructure in the future;
9. In undertaking any consultation, that
 - a. where an issue involves the wider interests of a town which is served by a number of wards, members in all those town wards be consulted, rather than just those in the ward where the issue arises;
 - b. that officers have greater awareness of the need to consult other internal services to ensure that all interests are taken into account.

86 Parishes Together Fund update

The committee received an update report from the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Business on the work of the New Homes Bonus Panel in dealing with applications from towns and parishes for funding to support community projects. His [presentation](#) outlined some statistics on funding awarded and highlighted some projects of interest.

Many projects were successful because of parishes and towns working together to bid for funding for a project, one example being to provide a bus service for parishes around Budleigh Salterton to get to the town's community hospital. The parishes were able to apply for funding to top up their funds already collected to the cost required for purchase and running of the service. This meant that, in working together, the parish of Colaton Raleigh had a bus service to the community hospital for the allocation of £400.

The Portfolio Holder asked the committee to consider the scope of the projects that had been awarded funding, and asked them to take that information back to their parishes and encourage them to apply to make use of their allocation. He also gave thanks to Jamie Buckley, Community Engagement and Funding Officer for her work with DCC to help applicants work up their projects to bring to the Panel.

Parish meetings (those that do not have a parish council) are permitted to apply jointly with at least one other parish council in order to access the funding available to them.

Cross-boundary applications were not presently possible because of the differences in how other districts operated their schemes, but this would be reviewed to see if a compromise could be reached to allow the outer parishes of the district to work their neighbours across the border to help obtain funding for community projects.

***87 Performance Monitoring for Third Quarter 2014/15**

The committee considered the performance monitoring report deferred from their last meeting. Concern was expressed at the number of days lost to sickness and members already had an understanding, and were sympathetic to, the impact on that performance indicator due to long term illness of a small number of staff.

RESOLVED

That the committee receive a future report on the measures taken to address the number of working days lost due to sickness absence.

***88 Draft Annual Report**

Comments were made on the continued developments on health provision and members felt that the report should reflect the continued work by members to keep a watching brief on the topic.

RESOLVED

That the Chairman and Vice Chairman agree the final version of the committee's annual report for submission to Annual Council in May 2015.

Attendance list

Present:

Tim Wood (Chairman)
Graham Troman (Vice Chairman)
Mike Allen
Peter Bowden
Maddy Chapman
Deborah Custance Baker
Vivien Duval Steer
David Key
Peter Halse
John Humphreys
Sheila Kerridge
Frances Newth
Tony Howard
Brenda Taylor
Eileen Wragg
Steve Wragg

Ray Bloxham
Susie Bond
Paul Diviani
Christine Drew
Jill Elson
Graham Godbeer
Martin Gammell
Stephanie Jones
Andrew Moulding
Peter Sullivan
Pauline Stott

Phil Twiss

Alderman Mike Green

Sally Kind, Jurassic Coast Team

Jamie Buckley, Community Engagement and Funding Officer

Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

Giles Salter, Solicitor

Apologies:

David Chapman

Roger Giles

Claire Wright

Steve Gazzard

Alan Dent

Tom Wright

Chairman

Date.....