

FINANCE AND AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 12 February 2013 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Barrott, MacKay, Pittarello, Rhead, Mrs Sawdon, Mrs Syson, Williams and Wilkinson.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dagg, Mrs Knight, Mrs Mellor and Pratt.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Mobbs (Portfolio Holder for Finance) and Vincett (Portfolio Holder for Housing & Property Services).

129. **SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor Wilkinson acted as substitute for Councillor Mrs Knight.

130. **NOMINATIONS FOR INTERIM CHAIR**

Proposed and duly seconded that Councillor Barrott be nominated as interim Chair in Councillor Mrs Knight's absence.

131. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

132. **LOCAL PLAN RISK REGISTER**

The Committee were advised that the Portfolio Holder for this item, Councillor Caborn, had been unable to attend the meeting to discuss the Local Plan Risk Register.

The Committee were dissatisfied that this was the second time the item had to be deferred and asked that the acting Chair, Councillor Barrott, write to Councillor Caborn outlining their concerns. Members were acutely aware that deadlines for the Local Plan were imminent and had a number of queries that they would like the Portfolio Holder to address in person.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the discussion of the Local Plan Risk Register be deferred to March 2013 and Councillor Caborn be requested to attend; and
- (2) Councillor Barrott write to Councillor Caborn expressing the Committee's concerns.

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133. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2013 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

134. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON-CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)

The Committee considered the following non-confidential items which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 13 February 2013.

Item 8 – Treasury Management Strategy Plan 2013/2014

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report and were encouraged that the Council was making far safer investments with little or no loss in earnings.

135. PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item, by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within paragraphs 1, 3 and 7 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

136. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)

The Committee considered the following confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 13 February 2013.

Item 11 – Retail Development in Leamington Town Centre – update report

The Council's Development Services Manager and a member of staff from the County Council's legal team, Sian Stroud, presented the report and answered a number of questions from the Committee.

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report and made an official recommendation to the Executive, the full details of which would be included in a confidential minute.

137. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON-CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)

The Committee considered the following non-confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 13 February 2013.

FINANCE AND AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

Item 5 –Budget 2013/2014 and Council Tax – Revenue and Capital

The Head of Finance introduced the report and outlined the recommendations. A presentation had been received by Members prior to Group meetings giving greater detail on the report.

Councillor Rhead expressed concern that the presentation had been unduly pessimistic and reminded the Committee that the Council were in a far better financial position than a lot of local authorities. He felt it was important to congratulate the officers for their work to date.

It was also recognised that the stringent Procurement work carried out had led to a better financial position than previously and Members were given an update on the progress made to fill the procurement officer vacancy.

The Committee supported recommendation 2.8 and recognised that the Council needed to look toward growth and development in the local community, taking into account the five Delivery Plans that would accompany the Local Plan if the Councils finances were to continue to improve.

Concerns were raised regarding the Planning appeal reserve which the Committee felt may need looking at in light of what could happen with HS2 and as a consequence of the emerging Local Plan.

The Committee had concerns about recommendation 2.9 and felt that contributions from the smaller councils should be on a pro rata / population basis and not on the equivalent level as the larger, city councils. This was particularly pertinent to Coventry City Council which was not only much larger than a lot of the District Councils but also had the most to gain from the LEP. Members agreed to put forward an official recommendation to the Executive as follows:

Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee recommends that the contribution to the Coventry & Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership for District Councils be calculated on a pro rata basis.

138. PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item, by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within paragraphs 1, 3 and 7 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

139. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)

The Committee considered the following confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 13 February 2013.

FINANCE AND AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Continued)

Item 13 – Early Retirement

The Committee noted that this report was due to go to Employment Committee the following evening and a number of Members advised that they would raise their queries at that stage.

However, the lack of a business case was noted on this occasion but Members understood that no restructure had taken place as yet in the department.

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

140. **EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON-CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)**

The Committee considered the following non-confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 13 February 2013.

9 – Rural Footway Lighting

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report but raised a number of queries including why the District Council had responsibility for some lights when the County Council were responsible for others and where the respective responsibilities lay.

Members also enquired whether the new light columns would have the facility to be independently controlled, in light of the recent WCC programme of switching off street lights at night.

The Head of Finance agreed to ask the report author to respond to the Committee directly.

141. **COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE**

A report from Civic and Committee Services summarised the Executive's response to comments which the Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee gave on reports submitted to the Executive on 13 December 2012.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

142. **FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered a report from Civic and Committee Services informing it of the current Forward Plan, attached as an appendix to the report.

One of the five main roles of overview and scrutiny in local government was to undertake pre-decision scrutiny of Executive decisions. If the Committee had an interest in a future decision to be made by the Executive it was within the Committee's remit to feed into the process.

The Forward Plan detailed the future work programme for the Executive. If a non-executive member highlighted a decision which was to be taken by the Executive which they would like to be involved in, Members could then

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provide useful background to the Committee when the report was submitted to the Executive and they were passing comment on it.

RESOLVED that there were no forthcoming Executive decisions which the Committee wished to have an input into before the Executive make their decision, at present.

143. REVIEW OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

A report from Civic and Committee Services detailed the Committee's work programme for 2012/13.

It was agreed that the Local Plan Risk Register needed to be moved to March 2013 but no additional items were added.

RESOLVED that the work programme for 2012/13 be noted.

144. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON-CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)

The Committee considered the following non-confidential items which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 13 February 2013.

Item 6 – HRA Rent Setting

The Head of, and the Portfolio Holder for, Housing and Property Services introduced the report and answered a number of queries from the Committee.

Concern was raised that the 3.63% increase in rent would affect the most vulnerable members of society, who were being squeezed further in poor financial circumstances. The Portfolio Holder was asked if officers had considered a 0% increase in rents, in line with the Council's stance on Council Tax increases.

Councillor Vincett explained that future plans for increased development restricted them from reducing the increase further. He explained that with the proposed increase, the Council would still result in a loss of £370k and so felt that a realistic balance had to be met.

The Committee discussed the Welfare Reforms and the impact these may have on residents, specifically the 'Bedroom Tax'. Members were advised that the Head of Housing and Property Services had already taken steps to contact existing residents who were under occupying and would be affected directly. To underpin this, Members were reminded that there would be further training on the Welfare Reforms on Monday 25th February 2013.

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report.

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Item 7 – Approval of Heating, Lighting and Water Charges 2013/14 – Council Tenants

The Committee was content with the majority of the report but raised concerns regarding recommendation 2.3 which Members felt was not strong enough.

It was agreed that an amended recommendation be proposed to Executive which would ensure the energy efficiency works were carried out and completed before Winter 2013. The amendment proposed was:

- 2.3 That officers identify the energy efficiency improvements of sheltered housing and very sheltered housing schemes by May 2013, with a view to begin work over the summer and in time for completion by Winter 2013.

The Committee noted the recommendations in the report.

(The meeting ended at 8.11 pm)