

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 10 February 2015 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00 pm.

**Present:** Councillor Mrs Falp (Chairman); Councillors Mrs Blacklock, Boad, Mrs Bromley, Ms Dean, De-Lara-Bond, Mrs Grainger, Gill, Guest, Illingworth, Weber and Wreford-Bush.

**Also Present:** Councillor Mobbs.

Prior to starting the meeting, the Chairman called for a minute's silence as a mark of respect for Warwick District Councillor MacKay, who passed away recently.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kinson OBE.

## 95. **Substitutes**

Councillor De-Lara-Bond substituted for Councillor Copping and Councillor Weber substituted for Councillor Edwards.

## 96. **Declarations of Interest**

Minute number 103 - Executive Agenda (Non-confidential items and reports) – Wednesday 11 February 2015

Councillor Boad declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Executive Item number 8 – Allocation of budget to deliver voluntary sector services in Warwick District, 2015 – 2018 because he was a trustee of the chain and the Chairman of Crown Routes. He left the meeting when this item was discussed, and since it was the last item discussed on the evening, he did not return to the meeting.

## 97. **The English Romany Community**

The Chairman welcomed Mr West, a leading figure in the English Romany community. Mr West had asked to speak to the Committee to inform it about the problems faced by the Romany community finding sites to live, and for advice on how best to make the views of the English Romany heard by local authorities. He emphasised that he was speaking on behalf of the Old English Romany community and not all travelling communities, and in particular he was representing his own family and colleagues who were part of the old English Romany Community.

Mr West explained that he was looking for a site in the Warwick area for his family and understood that, in general, the English Romany way of life did not receive good press coverage. He understood very well why planning applications for sites to set up English Romany sites met with antagonism and opposition and felt that some of this was the fault of the English Romany, which was not good at putting forward its case.

Mr West explained that he wanted to change the way his community had traditionally sought sites. He wanted to approach councils first to find out where the councils wanted gypsies and travellers sited rather than find a

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES (Continued)**

site and then seek retrospective planning permission which could lead immediately to confrontation as the local authority sought to remove the Romany community off this land. He wanted the Council to make provision in its Local Plan for gypsy and traveller sites, even though he understood that this could give rise to political opposition.

He informed Members that a site should ideally be a field where caravans could be parked. This field should not be far from the local community, although it would best be located on the periphery. However, it should be close to local amenities such as schools and GP practices. The site should be discreet, but separate to local housing, so that local residents and the English Romany would not be living "cheek by jowl".

Members were invited to ask Mr West questions.

He asked for a network of privately owned sites that would allow the Romany community to move around. He could not be specific on how long a family would remain at a site. The community would dictate which families could use each site.

He recognised that the Travelling community had received bad press in respect of mess and damage left at sites and he was considering reaching out to the media to produce a TV programme about his own family, which would show the community in a good light. He was at pains to point out that his family represented the best of English Romany traditions and should not be confused with other travelling communities who had no such traditions. Indeed, since he was asking for privately owned sites, it was likely that permission would be refused to travellers who were not members of the old English Romany community to set up pitch on their sites.

The Chairman thanked Mr West for the information he had provided.

### **98. Leader's Portfolio Holder Update**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Mobbs, gave an update on his portfolio, followed by a Question and Answer Session.

Councillor Mobbs informed the Committee of some of the main projects that the Council had been working towards such as:

- streamlining and achieving savings in the way the Council operated;
- Riverside House relocation;
- Leisure options;
- The Waterloo Housing project, but it was hoped that in the future, the Council would be building its own housing;
- helping new and existing councillors to serve their constituencies and District through training and development;
- to improve the District so that it was a magnet for new business;
- to agree the Local Plan; and
- regeneration projects such as Lillington.

In response to questions from Committee Members, Councillor Mobbs informed them that:

- the Council had learnt from experience. In the case of the headquarters relocation project, it had been realised that it was

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES (Continued)**

important to engage more with Members and ensure plans and ideas were explained;

- arrangements were in place to help new councillors get up to speed after the elections. Work was underway on a training programme. The first few weeks after the election would be very intensive for new councillors, and the training programme would include some sessions that were mandatory for all councillors;
- the Local Plan was a living document and we could expect that it would change frequently. It was within the Scrutiny Committees' gift to scrutinise it. Councillor Mobbs suggested that Members wait until after the elections and then determine a method for monitoring; and
- It was important to work with the sub-region and the LEP to gain funding to continue to make the District a great place to live and work.

Councillor Mrs Falp, in summing up the Leader's update, commented that maybe the Council had missed an opportunity with the Members' Induction programme by not asking experienced Members to help train the less experienced ones.

### **99. LEP Update**

Councillor Mobbs gave the Committee an update on the work being carried out by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

A review of the structure of the Coventry Warwickshire LEP had been undertaken over the previous few months, together with its relationship with local authority partners. This review had led to examining the role of Business Groups and how they could contribute constructively to supporting the work of the CW LEP and to the delivery of the projects and schemes that had been announced in Growth Deals. Some Groups over the last few years had made good progress in delivering tangible outcomes against objectives and others were becoming less directly relevant to the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and Growth Deal. The result of these deliberations had been a revised overall structure and making amendments to the Groups to put them in a position to help realise what had to be delivered over the coming months. Councillor Mobbs then undertook to send a copy of this revised structure to the Committee Services Officer for onward circulation to Committee Members.

Councillor Mobbs informed Members that on 23 February at 6pm, there would be a presentation from Warwickshire County Council and Coventry City Council on the criteria on how Warwick District linked in with other councils. All prospective new councillors had been invited to attend.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Mobbs for giving an update on the LEP and about his portfolio.

Councillor Mobbs finished by saying that reports would be going to Executive in March on regeneration projects, and he wanted Group Leaders to speak to him on this.

(Councillor Mobbs left the meeting.)

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES (Continued)**

### **100. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2015 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **101. Comments from the Executive**

The Committee considered a report from Democratic Services which detailed the responses the Executive gave to the comments the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made regarding the reports submitted to the Executive in January.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

### **102. Review of the Work Programme & Forward Plan**

The Committee considered its work programme for 2015/16 and the latest published version of the Forward Plan.

The Chairman had agreed that the report on the Housing Allocations Policy would move to June 2015 to tie in with when a report on the subject would be going to Executive.

Members resolved that there was no need to undertake a review of the Council's Volunteering Policy or to form a Task & Finish Group to work on a Staff Volunteering Policy. Both these projects had been scheduled for March 2015 on the Committee's Work Programme.

The Committee requested that the HR Manager attend a meeting to explain about the Learning Academy. She had written a short briefing note on this in response to a request for more information following the annual report on Outside Bodies, but Members felt the information could be better provided by her attending and speaking to them.

At the previous Full Council meeting, the proliferation of Lettings and Sales Notice Boards had been discussed. It had been resolved that "this this Council will form a Task & Finish Group which will undertake further research and consultation to understand the views of stakeholders in relation to pursuing with the Secretary of State a Regulation 7 Direction of the 2007 Town and Country Planning Act and that the Task & Finish Group will report back to members via the Overview & Scrutiny Committee".

Councillor Weber had prepared a Scoping Document which the Committee was asked to approve. However, it was felt that it did not go far enough and it needed to include the consequences of any action the Council might take, financial consequences and how the Council might monitor the problem.

It was agreed to set up a working party to deliver the Scoping Document and report back to Overview & Scrutiny in March. It was agreed that the Chairman would send an email to all councillors asking for volunteers for the working party, but that Councillors Heath and Weber would be members of the working party as they had already expressed interest.

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES (Continued)**

**Resolved** that

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the review of the Volunteering Policy and the Task & Finish Group work for Staff Volunteering is no longer required; and
- (3) the Chairman to send an email to all councillors requesting volunteers to serve on a working party to determine a Scoping Document in respect of Lettings and Sales notice boards. The Scoping Document will be presented to Overview & Scrutiny in March 2015.

### 103. **Executive Agenda (Non-confidential items and reports) – Wednesday 11 February 2015**

The Committee considered the following non-confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 11 February 2015.

#### Item number 8 – Allocation of budget to deliver voluntary sector services in Warwick District, 2015 - 2018

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommended that in respect of Recommendation 2.2 in the report, the Executive did not agree to the revised decision making process as described in points 3.6 to 3.12 in the report in respect of voluntary sector commissioning whereby future tenders were evaluated by an officer panel prior to being submitted to the Deputy Chief Executive (AJ) in consultation with the Chair of the Member Grant Review Panel for final approval.

The Committee cited the following reasons for asking the Executive not to agree the revised decision process:

- (1) Members felt that their integrity and ability to declare interests where appropriate when tenders were submitted was being questioned;
- (2) Members felt that their involvement in Outside Bodies was seen as causing conflict with the decision making process;
- (3) Members felt that their involvement in Outside Bodies contributed to the decision making process;
- (4) Members believed that their skill set and knowledge of the Voluntary Sector would not be used as a result of the curtailment of their involvement fully in the process;
- (5) It was noted that an officer approval process would mean that councillors' involvement would become a mere formality and not active participation;
- (6) Members felt that undue influence from the Voluntary Sector to curtail Members' involvement had been accepted without challenge or Member consultation.

(Councillor Boad left the meeting at the start of discussions and did not return.)

(The meeting finished at 7.45 pm)