

**POLICY SCRUTINY GROUP
11TH JULY 2017**

PRESENT: Councillor Seaton (Chair)
Councillor Maynard Smith (Vice-chair)
Councillors Gaskell, K. Harris, Jones, Murphy, Page, Parton,
Rollings and Smith
Councillor Bokor attended for item 6

Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Head of Planning and Regeneration
Head of Strategic Support
Communications Manager
Democratic Services Manager
Improvement and Organisational Development Manager
Team Leader Regeneration and Economic Development
Democratic Services Officer (MH)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Paling

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th April 2017 were confirmed and signed as a correct record of the meeting.

2. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

The following disclosures of interest were made:

- (i) Councillor Parton – a personal interest in item 8, Loughborough Town Centre Masterplan, as he had been appointed to the Loughborough Town Team by Leicestershire County Council.

3. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations of the existence of the Party Whip were made.

4. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURES 11.17

No questions had been submitted.

5. PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL UPDATE

The former Chair of the Performance Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Bokor, and the Head of Strategic Support provided a verbal update on the current position regarding the work of the Performance Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Bokor referred to the fact that she had recently been appointed to the Cabinet and would, therefore, no longer be Chair of the Performance Scrutiny Panel. She thanked the members of the Panel and the officers who supported the Panel for their hard work.

The Head of Strategic Support outlined the items that had recently been considered by the Panel and some of the forthcoming items in its work programme. There were a number of red Business Plan activities and key performance indicators at the end of the financial year.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge the information received.

6. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S POLICIES AND PROCEDURES REGARDING SURVEYS AND CONSULTATION

A report of the Head of Strategic Support, providing details of the Council's approach to consultation and of the Council's Communications Strategy, was submitted (item 7 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

Councillor Parton arrived at 6:10pm.

The Head of Strategic Support and the Communications Manager assisted with consideration of the item and provided the following responses to issues raised:

- (i) It was recognised that the response rates for some surveys and consultations had been low. As a result the Council had sought advice from a market research company, which had been included with the briefing note on consultations that had been prepared for officers.
- (ii) There had been 1,080 responses to the 2015 residents' survey. This was a very good response rate and comparable with response rates to similar surveys by other councils. Although the 2015 residents' survey had been successful, lessons had been learnt and these would be applied to try and further increase the number of responses to the 2017 survey. In particular there would probably be more targeted face to face events and the planning of the survey would include identifying different groups and how to reach them effectively. The Council was continuing to develop the use of social media for promoting consultations and surveys.
- (iii) When conducting surveys and consultation, the Council considered which groups it was trying to reach and which of those would be harder to reach. If groups were hard to reach then consideration was given to using organisations or individuals to improve access to

those groups. Councillor with social media accounts could use them to increase the reach of the Council's communications.

- (iv) A greater response had been achieved where consultations had a budget available to support them, for example the residents' survey and the consultation on empty homes which had included information sent with Council Tax bills. Information could be provided to members of the Group regarding the methods that had been used for recent consultations and the results.
- (v) Various methods could be used to reach people and encourage them to respond. Stalls in Loughborough Market Place had been tried but the response rate was low. A market research company would charge about £7,500 for a statistically reliable 384 responses via telephone survey.
- (vi) The Council had used incentives to increase participation in surveys and consultation but with mixed success. For example, an iPad had been offered as an incentive for the residents' survey in 2013 but not in 2015, and yet there had been a greater number of responses in 2015.
- (vii) If councillors had ideas for how to reach a wider range of residents they could contact the Improvement and Organisational Development Manager.
- (viii) The Communications Strategy would be submitted to the Cabinet for approval.
- (ix) The Council's website was independently assessed by Socitm (a society for IT practitioners in the public sector) and its rating was improving.

Members of the Group expressed the following views:

- (i) It was important that the Council ensured that hard to reach groups were adequately represented in the results of consultations and surveys. Ward councillors could assist in promoting consultations and surveys to residents, including hard to reach groups.
- (ii) Greater use of social media was to be welcomed as it provided a cost-effective means of communication with a good reach.
- (iii) It would be appropriate for the Council to offer incentives for participating in consultations and surveys. These could be particularly effective as part of social media campaigns.
- (iv) It was disappointing that there had only been 40 responses to the Community Governance Review consultation despite the effort that had been put into it.

RESOLVED

1. that the report be noted;
2. that it be noted that officers would consider the suggestions made by the Group in respect of increasing participation in surveys and

consultation, particularly in relation to obtaining assistance from ward councillors in promoting surveys and consultation and the benefits of using incentives, especially as part of social media campaigns;

3. that information regarding the methods that had been used for recent consultations and the results be circulated to members of the Group;
4. that a further report in respect of the Council's policies and procedures regarding surveys and consultation be submitted to the meeting of the Group scheduled for 6th February 2018.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the information received.
2. To acknowledge the views of the Group and how they would be taken forward.
3. To supplement the information provided in the report.
4. To enable the Group to compare the methods and results of the 2017 residents' survey with those of the 2015 survey.

7. LOUGHBOROUGH TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

A report of the Head of Planning and Regeneration, providing an update on the development of the Loughborough Town Centre Masterplan, was submitted (item 8 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Planning and Regeneration and the Team Leader Regeneration and Economic Development assisted with consideration of the item and provided the following responses to issues raised:

- (i) All the feedback from the previous stakeholder workshops would be summarised as part of the public consultation documents that would be published, including character areas, public realm improvements and possible development options. The consultation documents would identify preferred options and the reasons that they were chosen.
- (ii) There would be a communications plan to accompany the six-week consultation period, which would start on 11th August. The consultation would include reconvening the stakeholder group, which had 55 members, specific consultation with retailers located around Bedford Square and the Loughborough BID, and a dedicated website. The consultation would be supported by information boards, press releases and social media. Flyers would not be used as they were not thought to be effective. There would also be a briefing for councillors.

- (iii) There were no plans to hold consultation events outside Loughborough town centre.
- (iv) The draft documents would not include provision for a bus station in the town centre but reference would be made to bus hubs and investment in them.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge the information received.

8. REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

A report of the Head of Head of Planning and Regeneration, providing an update on the review of the Regeneration Strategy and the Economic Development Strategy, was submitted (item 9 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Planning and Regeneration and the Team Leader Regeneration and Economic Development assisted with consideration of the item and provided the following responses to issues raised:

- (i) Stakeholders for the consultation events would mainly be drawn from the Charnwood Together Economy and Skills Group. This included representative groups such as the Federation of Small Businesses. The Loughborough BID would also be a stakeholder, but it only covered a small part of the Borough.
- (ii) In the past consultation using material circulated with business rates bills had been tried but this had resulted in a poor response rate.

A member of the Group commented that it would be helpful if reports included an explanation of any acronyms that were used.

RESOLVED

1. that the report be noted;
2. that a further report in respect of the Economic Development Strategy be submitted to the Group's meeting scheduled for 21st November 2017.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the information received.
2. To enable further scrutiny of the matter to take place alongside the stakeholder consultation events.

9. CHANGES TO THE NEW HOMES BONUS REGIME

A report of the Strategic Director of Corporate Services, providing information requested by the Group regarding changes to the New Homes Bonus regime, was submitted (item 10 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Strategic Director of Corporate Services assisted with consideration of the item and provided the following responses to issues raised:

- (i) The forecasts for net additional homes were based on information from the Core Strategy and past performance regarding the delivery of new homes. The net figure also included properties coming into or going out of use. Those changes could be significant at between 50 and 100 properties per year. There was therefore a link between the success of the Council's Empty Homes Strategy and the amount of New Homes Bonus the Council received.
- (ii) New Homes Bonus was calculated using Council Tax return figures sent to the Government. There was no impact on the amount of New Homes Bonus that the Council received if properties became exempt from Council Tax. Newly built blocks of residential accommodation would be accounted for in terms of New Homes Bonus per unit of accommodation rather than per block.
- (iii) There were expected to be further changes to local authority funding as a result of the Fair Funding review in 2019 and moves towards local retention of business rates. However, there had been no mention of legislation for changes to the business rates regime in the recent Queen's Speech. Therefore, there was significant uncertainty regarding the Council's funding from 2021. As a result the Council's current Medium Term Financial Strategy set out an aim to reach 2020/21 with reserves of £4million rather than the recommended minimum level of £2million and it was likely that the next Medium Term Financial Strategy would adopt a similar approach.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge the information received.

10. PROGRESS WITH PANEL WORK

A report of the Head of Strategic Support, providing an update on the current position with scrutiny panels, was submitted (item 11 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Improvement and Organisational Development Manager assisted with consideration of the item.

RESOLVED that the current position with scrutiny panels be noted.

Reason

To ensure that the Group was aware of the current position with scrutiny panels.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of Strategic Support, enabling the Group to consider its work programme and propose to the Scrutiny Management Board any additions, deletions and amendments as appropriate, was submitted (item 12 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Improvement and Organisational Development Manager assisted with consideration of the item.

RESOLVED

1. that the additions to the Group's work programme agreed by the Scrutiny Management Board be noted;
2. that the items in the Group's work programme in respect of the Landlord Services Anti-social Behaviour Policy and the policy aspects of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan be scheduled for 21st November 2017;
3. that the Lead Members for Finance and Revenues and Benefits and Housing Landlord Services be invited to the Group's meeting scheduled for 21st November 2017 to support the Group's consideration of the policy aspects of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan;
4. that the current position with the Group's work programme, including the changes made during the meeting, be noted.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the decisions of the Scrutiny Management Board.
2. To enable the Group's scrutiny of those matters to be undertaken at an appropriate time.
3. To ensure the effectiveness of the Group's scrutiny of the matter.
4. To make the Group aware of the current position with its work programme.

NOTE:

These minutes are subject to confirmation as a correct record at the next ordinary meeting of the Group.