

**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
10 January 2012**

Present:

Councillor Philippa Broom (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Marian Rough (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

A. Ayub	Ms M. Bushnell	Mrs I. Napper
Mrs C.A. Bannister	R.D. Dunn	Miss D. Patel
I.J. Beardsmore	D. Gohil	Ms J.R. Sexton

Apologies: Councillors M.P.C. Francis, Mrs C.E. Nichols, A.C. Patterson and Ms S. Webb

In Attendance

Councillor R. Watts, the Cabinet Member for the Environment, was in attendance and at the invitation of the Chairman took part in the discussion of those items relevant to his Portfolio.

1/12 Disclosure of Interests

Councillor Mrs C.A. Bannister declared a personal interest in Agenda item 8 – Sweeps Ditch due to the ditch running through her garden.

2/12 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2011 and the minutes of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 November 2011 were approved as a correct record.

3/12 Call in of Cabinet Decisions

No decisions had been called in.

4/12 Review of the Petitions Scheme

The Head of Corporate Governance outlined the main points of his report on how the current petitions scheme which had been required under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Constructions Act 2009 had operated over the last year.

The committee considered the key elements of the current petition scheme:

- (a) The ability to trigger a debate at an ordinary meeting of the Council with a threshold of at least 1000 signatories for a single ward issue and at least 4500 signatories for an issue affecting two or more wards.
- (b) The ability to hold a senior officer to account at an overview and scrutiny committee with a threshold of at least 300 signatories for a single ward issue and at least 400 signatories for an issue covering two or more wards.
- (c) The ability to trigger a debate at a Cabinet meeting with a threshold of between 20 to 200 signatories for a single ward issue and between 30 to 300 signatories for an issue covering two or more wards.
- (d) There is a right for the lead petitioner to request a review of the Council's response to the petition where the lead petitioner is unhappy with the way the petition has been handled.
- (e) Vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate petitions are excluded from the scheme, together with petitions which relate to individual planning, licensing or other issues where there is a statutory right of appeal.
- (f) The lead petitioner has an option under the scheme of requesting a response from a senior officer rather than taking the petition to a decision making meeting.
- (g) Elected councillors are eligible to sign petitions.
- (h) The scheme allows a wider definition of those who can petition the Council namely any person of any age who lives, works, studies or uses services in Spelthorne.

The committee noted that one of the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 was to remove the need for councils to have a petitions scheme.

The committee discussed the benefits of retaining the scheme and the need to look at any free marketing opportunities available to promote the facilities. The committee identified that the scheme could be promoted via the Borough Bulletin, the Council's notice boards and website as well as asking the local business community to promote through their notice boards and websites.

In considering the matter the committee recognised that e petitions and paper petitions were an important way in which residents could let the Council know of their concerns.

RESOLVED that

1. The report of the Head of Corporate Governance be received;
2. The current petitions scheme be retained with a further review of the scheme being undertaken once the Localism Act 2011 is enacted and the legal requirements to have petitions schemes is repealed, and

3. The Head of Corporate Governance to actively promote awareness of the scheme via the Council's Borough Bulletin, notice boards and website and any other free marketing opportunities that are available.

5/12 Planning Review

Mr S. Rough was in attendance and at the invitation of the Chairman invited to comment on the report and his involvement with the review which was undertaken when he was a serving Borough Councillor.

The Committee discussed with Heather Morgan, the Head of Planning and Housing Strategy, the report covering the completion and implementation of the recommendations of the Trevor Roberts Associates review of the planning service, which was undertaken in 2009.

The committee noted that there had been 250 recommendations, which mainly covered processes and customer care issues. As a result a series of action plans had been put in place to prioritise the recommendations. To ensure delivery of the actions a Leaders monitoring group was established in 2011. The members of the group were Councillors Mrs Pinkerton, R.A. Smith-Ainsley and S. Rough with a remit to discuss on a monthly basis the progress being made in implementing the recommendations set out in the action plans.

It was noted that the results of the external satisfaction survey undertaken in November 2011 would be available in February 2012. The survey would provide feedback from the wider community on the changes introduced through the TRA review. The outcome of this survey could also be compared to the survey undertaken in November 2009.

The Committee discussed the setting up of a Post Implementation Review Panel which could:

- Review the project performance
- Identify project achievements
- Identify project failures
- Identify lessons learned
- Identify any areas where the service could benefit from further improvement.
- Look at how Planning Officers could keep Ward Councillors informed

The Chairman thanked Mr S. Rough for attending the meeting and for his contribution to the discussion on this matter.

RESOLVED that:

1. The report of the Assistant Chief Executive be received;
2. A Post Implementation Review Panel be established to assess the effectiveness of the changes implemented following the TRA review

3. The Panel to meet in March/April 2012 and report their findings to a future meeting of this Committee;
4. The Panel to consider and make recommendations on areas where further improvements might be made to the planning service.
5. The Membership of the Panel to be Councillors D. Gohil, Miss D. Patel, Mrs I. Napper, Mrs M. Rough and R. Dunn with any other committee members wishing to serve on the Panel to notify the Chairman.
6. Mr S. Rough be invited to participate in the work of the Post Implementation Review Panel.

6/12 Sweeps Ditch

The Cabinet Member responsible for the Environment, Councillor R. Watts, was in attendance and at the invitation of the Chairman took part in the discussion.

The Committee received a presentation from the Environment Project Officer providing details of the management and maintenance of Sweeps Ditch. The presentation was divided into two parts. The first part covered background information on past management of the ditch, including the historical issues with the flow of water and the work undertaken to rectify the matter. He then went on to cover the financial implications of maintaining a flow to Sweeps Ditch.

The second part of the presentation covered future maintenance arrangements and the options that the officers together with the Cabinet Member responsible for the Environment had been looking into. The committee noted that the new maintenance scheme had been implemented through a one year contract with an option to extend for a longer term.

In support of the presentation members had regard to the briefing paper circulated with the agenda.

At the conclusion of the presentation members took the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers from the officers and the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor R. Watts.

The Chairman reminded the Officers of the importance of keeping Ward Councillors up to date with watercourse management issues.

RESOLVED that:

1. The presentation on Sweeps Ditch be received;
2. That the current intention to implement the continuation and improvement to the current management scheme be noted and the situation be reviewed in a year's time; and
3. An item be included on the work programme on Project Management.

7/12 Food Waste Collection Task Group

The Lead Member of the Task Group, Councillor Asif Ayub, reported verbally on the findings of the Task Group which had met on five occasions between June and November 2011 with the terms of reference being:

- To ensure that the food waste scheme was fit for purpose
- To ensure effective communications with the end result that residents understand the scheme and are aware and satisfied with it and feel it adds value to them
- To ensure that the councillors can be champions for the schemes.

Supplementary to this the Task Group wanted to ensure that

- Communication plans are developed, implemented and communicated
- Timelines and budgets to be clear
- Monitor progress with residents.

The Lead Member reported that the work undertaken by the Task Group had included reviewing and agreeing the publications to be produced. Discussing with the officers how the waste enforcement policies for side waste associated with rubbish and contamination of recycling would be enforced.

The Task Group had been pleased to note that since the introduction of the enforcement policy in July 2011 there had been an increase in recycling rates by 4% and they hoped that this would increase further with the introduction of the food waste scheme.

The Task Group felt that their overview had helped to ensure the scheme rolled out smoothly, publications were well received and the numbers of complaints were small and that communication with residents on all waste issues would continue.

The Task Group had identified that the tackling of food waste and increasing our recycling rates was not only important to protect the environment but also to reduce cost to our residents through delivering value for money.

The Lead Member placed on record his thanks and appreciation to all members of the Task Group for their commitment to the review. On behalf of the members of the Task Group he placed on record thanks and appreciation to the officer teams for Sustainability and Leisure, Streetscene and Communications for their help and support in undertaking the review.

During the general discussion on the work undertaken by the task group some members commented that they had observed when refuse staff empty food containers into slave bins some food material, but in particular liquid ends up on the road surface. The officers agreed to look into the matter and speak to the Head of Streetscene.

RESOLVED that:

1. To agree that the Food Waste Collection Task Group had completed its business;
2. To place on record the Task Groups thanks and appreciation to the officer team covering Sustainability and Leisure, Streetscene and communications;
3. To note that since the introduction of the waste enforcement policy the recycling rates had increased by 4%;
4. That communication with residents on all waste issues would continue; and
5. Ward Councillors be notified of any issues that may arise in their Ward.

8/12 Parks and Open Spaces Task Group

The Chairman reported verbally on the work being progressed by the Task Group and identified that the Group would continue to:

- Explore revenue income streams
- Explore external funding opportunities
- Looking at additional developments which could both improve the infrastructure in parks and save money as well as making parks a more welcoming place to visit

RESOLVED that:

1. The progress report on the work of the Task Group be noted; and
2. A further report be submitted to a future meeting of the committee.

9/12 Cabinet Forward Plan

The Committee received the Cabinet Forward Plan and asked that information on the Members Allowance scheme be made available to members at the meeting on 7 February 2012.

10/12 Work Programme

The Chairman invited members of the Committee to submit topics for consideration for inclusion in the work programme.

The Chairman reminded the committee that it had been agreed early in the evening that Project Management be included on the work programme.

11/12 Any Other business

The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Philippa Broom, on behalf of the committee acknowledged that this was Terry Collier first meeting with his additional responsibilities of Lead Officer to the Committee and thanked him for his support.