

**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
9 July 2013**

Present:

Councillor P.A. Broom (Chairman)
Councillor D. Patel (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

A. Ayub	C.M. Frazer	I.T.E. Harvey
C.A. Davis	A.E. Friday	M.W. Rough
R.D. Dunn	D. Gohil	S.D. Taylor

Apologies: Councillors F. Ayers, C.A. Bannister, M. Bushnell and M.J. Madams

In Attendance: Councillor P. Forbes-Forsyth, Cabinet member for Community Safety, Young People, Leisure and Culture and Councillor N. Gething, Cabinet member for Economic Development and Fixed Assets attended the meeting and took part in the discussion on those items relevant to their Portfolio.

174/13 Disclosures of Interest

Councillor C. Davis disclosed a pecuniary interest in Item 5. Update on Spelthorne's Allotments, as he is a tenant of a Spelthorne owned allotment.

175/13 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2013 were approved as a correct record.

176/13 Call in of a Leader, Cabinet or Cabinet Member Decision

No decisions had been called in.

177/13 Update on Spelthorne's Allotments

The Committee received a briefing paper from the Head of Sustainability and Leisure on the management of the Council's allotment sites. It noted the work being done to reduce waiting lists and gradually move the sites over to self-management.

RESOLVED to note the update on Spelthorne's allotments.

178/13 Housing Issues in Spelthorne during the economic downturn

The Committee received a briefing paper on housing issues during the economic downturn including: the acute shortage of affordable accommodation both in the public and private rented sector; challenges arising as a result of the welfare reform changes; the rising costs to the Council associated with implementing homeless legislation and administering discretionary housing payments and the uncertainty faced by the Housing Benefit staff over their future.

The Vice-Chairman asked the officers to provide statistics on the number of households facing difficulties due to the welfare reform changes and how the Council is dealing with the costs associated with implementing homeless legislation.

RESOLVED to note the briefing paper on Housing Issues.

179/13 Update on Economic Strategy programme

The Committee received an update on the actions which had been taken to prepare an Economic Strategy for the Borough, following this Committee's recommendation to Cabinet of the need for such a strategy. Public consultation on a Local Economic Assessment, a forerunner to preparation of the strategy itself, and a business survey had both been carried out. The results of these were currently being analysed and would be available by the end of this month, with the draft strategy being ready in September/October 2013.

RESOLVED to note the update on the Economic Strategy programme.

180/13 Planning – TRA review and levels of customer satisfaction

The Committee received an update on the improvements which had taken place in the planning service following the Trevor Roberts Associates review of 2009. A survey in 2011 showed higher levels of customer satisfaction and highlighted further areas for improvement which had also been addressed.

Members commented that Planning was a particularly sensitive issue for residents, which took up most of their time so they welcomed the improvements that had been made to the service.

The Committee discussed the TRA recommendations and other improvements that could be made to the planning application process and considered whether it may wish to look at this further as part of its work programme.

RESOLVED to note the update on the Planning TRA review and levels of customer satisfaction.

181/13 Update on Spelthorne's Project Management methodology

The Committee received an update on progress with the Project Management methodology. There were now 24 Flagship Projects, which it acknowledged was a large number to manage for an authority of Spelthorne's size.

The Committee noted that it would receive updates at every meeting.

In response to a question about the plan for Laleham Park, officers advised that the way forward was being discussed at the Leader's task group on Environment and Waste, before a new master plan was drawn up.

RESOLVED to note the update on Spelthorne's Project Management methodology.

182/13 Provisional Capital Outturn 2012/13

The Committee received the provisional Capital outturn for 2012/13. It noted that £634k had been spent against a revised budget including carry forwards from 2011/12 of £1.753m. A large proportion of the £1.119m underspend would be carried forward to 2013/2014.

The Committee was concerned about the high amount of carry forwards and whether this might indicate a lack of management. The Chief Finance Officer explained that most of the capital programme was spent on projects and now that improvements and additional resources were in place, this would help ensure the Council delivered more projects in the coming year.

He confirmed that the Portfolio Holder for Finance, with officers, would be reviewing the capital programme over the summer period.

The Chairman informed the Committee that she had asked for an update on remote working from the Assistant Chief Executive and this would be added as an item in its work programme.

The Committee noted that it had found the previous use of written narrative to explain delays in capital spending useful and asked that this be reinstated.

The Committee discussed the Council's IT projects and due to its concerns about the ability of the Council to manage the Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) project agreed to add this to the work programme.

RESOLVED

- (1) to note the provisional capital outturn spend for 2012/13;
- (2) to include an item on remote working in the Committee's work programme for 2013/14 and
- (3) to include an item on ICT projects including VOIP in the Committee's work programme for 2013/14.

183/13 Treasury Management Annual Report 2012/13

The Committee discussed the Treasury Management Annual Report on treasury performance for 2012/13, covering the council's activities in the borrowing and investment market.

The Assistant Chief Executive explained that given the Council's dependency on investment returns to balance the budget it was considered appropriate to evaluate alternative investment options with a view to achieving higher returns into the future. An appropriate new strategy was developed during the year and had now been fully implemented, delivering healthy initial returns.

The Assistant Chief Executive reassured the Committee that the Council's portfolio would be kept under constant review in consultation with our treasury advisors to optimise investment performance whilst keeping risk to a minimum.

RESOLVED to note the Treasury Management Annual Report 2012/13.

184/13 Provisional Revenue Outturn 2012/13

The Committee discussed the report on the provisional Revenue outturn for 2012/13 and noted that £11.707m had been spent against the original budget of £12.371m. The Principal Accountant explained that the favourable outturn enabled the Council to protect its balance sheet position by not using Interest Equalisation Reserve in 2012/13, to accommodate carry forwards of £164k into 2013/14 and replenish invest to save reserves.

The Chairman advised that she had queried the garden waste bin situation with the Head of Sustainability and Leisure and that she would provide an update of the current situation.

RESOLVED:

- (1) to note the provisional Revenue outturn for 2012/13 and
- (2) that the Head of Sustainability and Leisure provide an update on the current situation with regards to garden waste bins.

185/13 Leisure and Culture Strategy

The Committee received a presentation from the Leisure Services Manager on the draft Leisure and Culture Strategy for 2013-2016, which following further discussions would be amended to include more on the health and wellbeing and economic benefits of leisure facilities.

The Committee endorsed the comments of the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture that as the strategy relates to a discretionary service, it was important to make a compelling business case to justify the service and entice external funding in order to ensure its future viability.

The Committee discussed areas which they felt had been omitted from the draft Strategy, such as tourism, the river and uniformed youth organisations and suggested these be included. It agreed to establish a task group led by Councillor Frazer, with Councillor Friday assisting, to work with the officers to further develop the draft strategy, which would be brought back to the next meeting for further consideration.

RESOLVED:

- (1) to note the draft Leisure and Culture Strategy 2013 – 2016;
- (2) to form a mini task group with Councillor Frazer as lead and Councillor Friday assisting to work with the officers in developing the Strategy and
- (3) to consider the second draft of the Strategy at the Committee's next meeting.

186/13 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Arrangements

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor D. Patel, gave a presentation explaining the meaning of Scrutiny and the role and work of the Committee.

A summary of the work undertaken by the Committee during the last year was circulated at the meeting.

The Chairman gave an update on the work of each of the Task Groups established last year.

- The Projects Task Group had completed its work and produced templates to assist new task groups in managing their work.
- The Planning Post-Implementation Task Group had not progressed its work.
- The Parks and Open Spaces (including Skate Parks) Task Group had merged into the Laleham Park Task Group.
- The Assets Task group had been superceded by a Leader's Task group.

She reminded members that if they were sitting on one of the three Leader's Task Groups that they would not be able to scrutinise the work of those Task Groups.

The Committee then split into three discussion groups to identify the areas they would like to include in their work programme for the coming year. They considered topics under the headings of: internal (critical support services); external (delivery of direct residents' services); formal partnerships; informal partnerships, and residents.

The groups fed back the outcome of their discussions and the Chairman advised that she would meet with the Vice-Chairman and officers to draft a work programme for the Committee based on the areas identified.

187/13 Cabinet Forward Plan

The Committee received the Cabinet Forward Plan.

RESOLVED to note the Forward Plan.

188/13 Work Programme

The Chairman confirmed once more that she would be working with the Vice-Chairman and officers to pull together the work programme from the ideas generated in the discussion groups.

She asked members to contact her if they had any further thoughts on topics they would like to see included.

RESOLVED to note the arrangements to produce a work programme.

189/13 Any Other Business

No other business reported.