

MINUTES of a meeting of the POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 28 JUNE 2017

Present: Councillor M Specht (Chairman)

Councillors N Clarke, T Eynon, J Geary, D Harrison, G Hoult, P Purver, V Richichi and N Smith

In Attendance: Councillors J Cotterill, J G Coxon, R Johnson, J Legrys and S Sheahan

Portfolio Holders: Councillors T Gillard and A V Smith MBE

Officers: Ms H Bell, Ms K Greenbank, Mr A Hunkin, Mr J Knight, Mr J Newton, Walford and Mrs R Wallace

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. MINUTES**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2017.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor V Richichi and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2017 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**4. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

No questions were received.

**5. DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT 2016**

The Leisure Services Team Leader presented the report to Members and Introduced Mr M Sandys, the Director of Public Health for Leicestershire.

Mr M Sandys gave a presentation to the Committee detailing the key findings within the annual report and proposals to improve the health and wellbeing in Leicestershire in the future.

Councillor T Eynon explained that as a County Councillor she had already had sight of the report and was pleased to have the opportunity to look deeper into the issues at Committee. Regarding the figure for people killed and seriously injured on roads, Councillor T Eynon questioned if there was a connection with the poor air quality as North West Leicestershire has the worst air pollution in the East Midlands. Mr M Sandys commented that he was aware of the air pollution issues in the area. He felt that it was an interesting topic as this area did not fall into the usual categories of traffic and urban pollution as there was also an airport, quarries, power station and agricultural pollution to consider. As the area was unique in that aspect, he would like to look into the issue further. He added that there were things that could be put in place to ease the traffic

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pollution but he would need to look into the qualifying factors before offering further advice.

Councillor J Geary commented that there were areas within the District that were totally reliant on solid fuel heating and asked how this would impact on the air quality. Mr M Sandys responded that it would have an impact but explained that there were options to improve such as installing a stove rather than an open fire.

In response to a question from Councillor T Eynon, Mr M Sandys stated that he would be happy to assist officers if the decision was taken to develop the Council's air quality plan.

Regarding the figure for recorded diabetes for the area which was worse than the national average, Councillor N Smith asked what could be done by the Council to improve as it was not always due to an unhealthy lifestyle. Mr M Sandys explained that the red indicator may actually be highlighting that GP's were diagnosing more cases of diabetes and therefore have an improved medical practice, if this was the case he would report back at a later date. He stated that the best proven way to make improvements and avoid type 2 diabetes was to encourage a healthier lifestyle with diet and physical activity.

Councillor D Harrison queried how the figures for the District were formulated. Mr M Sandys explained that they were driven by research and national science based evidence, which was solid and robust.

Councillor N Clarke commented that breast feeding initiation seemed to be a problem across the whole of the County and asked if there was any indication as to why that was. Mr M Sandys responded that it was unclear but could be a result of people's culture. He added that efforts were being made to improve by providing support for new mothers.

The Chairman thanked Mr M Sandys for his attendance and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

## **6. UPDATE REPORT - S106 CONTRIBUTIONS TO HEALTH**

The Head of Planning and Regeneration presented the report to Members and introduced Mr I Potter, the Deputy Chief Operator for the West Leicestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

Mr I Potter gave a presentation to the Committee detailing the work undertaken to secure Section 106 contributions, how they were spent within the District and current proposals in place.

Councillor N Smith raised concerns that such large sums of money were being held and not used when shortfalls in other public sector areas were being reported regularly. Mr I Potter explained that there were strict guidelines on how Section 106 money could be spent so it could not be put into other general funds. The Head of Planning and Regeneration added that Section 106 Contributions were used to address specific issues caused by a development, therefore the money could only be used for the specific purpose as agreed by all parties.

Councillor N Smith asked how medical practices that were not owned by the GP would be managed with regard to development through Section 106 contributions. Mr I Potter stated that on the whole practices were independent businesses and GP's would make

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decisions on how to develop and be sustainable. He added that all matters had to be aligned to develop a practice and this was why it could be a lengthy process.

Councillor T Eynon commented that she was pleased with the development of Long Lane Surgery and was looking forward to the opening. She was frustrated about the issues in getting the contributions allocated but did understand the limitations in the way the money could be spent. She highlighted that local people were understandably frustrated too, especially when Ashby Hospital was closed for good clinical reasons even though money is being held and not spent. She asked if there was anything that could be done to ensure the money was being spent correctly as people were complaining that services originally promised for Long Lane Surgery had not come into fruition. Mr I Potter stated that it was important to have a good working relationship with the Council and to have regular discussions on how improvements could be made with officers and GPs. He also commented that there were some really good examples of surgeries that had been developed with Section 106 Contributions only and were very successful, even if it had taken some time. He concluded that there was not a simple answer but he strongly believed that a positive relationship did help.

Councillor G Hoult was pleased to see the proposals, especially in Ashby as people were upset when the hospital closed. She asked if there was a timeline for the Ashby projects. Mr I Potter stated that initial plans indicated that they would be started in the next 12 to 18 months.

Councillor D Harrison understood that complaints had been received regarding unspent money, as well as problems locating a contact through the CCG to access the money. He was pleased that progress had been made thanks to the work of the Director of Services. He raised concerns that there could be sums of money held by many local authorities across the country and it was disappointing that a more flexible way of working could not be adopted. The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained that the authority tried to be as flexible as possible and could agree to release money in stages rather than wait until completion, helping to move projects forward.

Councillor N Clarke raised concerns that £1.1.million was currently unspent and concurred with Councillor D Harrison that it could be the same in authorities across the country. He felt that the system was broken as the CCG were not spending the money available and when it was being spent he was not convinced that it was being spent correctly. He gave Long Lane Surgery as an example as it was supposed to bring additional services into Coalville and although it was a good facility, two other surgeries had been closed and amalgamated with Long Lane Surgery. He felt that all that had been achieved was centralisation of services rather than the provision of additional services, therefore the money had not been spent as it was intended.

Councillor J Geary questioned the promise made of more funds for the health service nationally as a result of the EU Referendum. The Chairman stopped discussion at this point as it was not the correct forum to debate the issue.

The Chairman thanked Mr I Potter for his attendance and contribution to the meeting.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

**RESOLVED THAT:**

The report be noted.

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## 7. REVIEW OF PLANNING COMMITTEE SCHEME OF DELEGATION

The Head of Planning and Regeneration presented the report to Members, highlighting the proposed changes to the Planning Committee scheme of delegations to improve the openness of decision making.

Councillor J Geary commented that in the past every application was considered by the Planning Committee and therefore was more open and transparent. He acknowledged that delegating decisions to officers was designed to speed up the process but as the authority was currently exceeding national targets, he was unsure as to whether it was necessary. He was fully aware of which planning agent the proposals were aimed at and the fact that he was married to a previous District Councillor, however he still had connections to the authority through his brother in law. In Councillor J Geary's opinion, the agent's applications should still be considered by the Planning Committee due to this connection. Councillor J Geary also raised concerns regarding the proposed change in quorum for the Planning Committee as he believed it should be at least a third of the committee, which was in line with other committees. He was against the call-in of applications being restricted to the Ward Member as applications could be missed due to single Member Wards, especially as the call-in period was only five days. He felt this was not long enough. He was also unhappy with the proposal for the Chairman to have a say in deciding what applications were considered by the Planning Committee as the Chairman's son was a Director for Bellway Homes. He felt that it was not open or transparent. Councillor J Geary felt that each year Councillors were being excluded more from the decision making process and he was bitterly disappointed with the report.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration acknowledged that the authority did exceed national targets but he felt there was always room for improvements. He stated that the aim of the report was to have the right applications considered by Planning Committee. He stated that similar applications by other agents were often not called-in, if refused and appealed against, the decision was likely to be upheld. However, for the agent in question, appeals against decisions made by the Planning Committee were more likely to be overturned and allowed. The Head of Planning and Regeneration wanted to make the process fair for all. Regarding the call-in by Ward Members only, he commented that arrangements had been made in the past for neighbouring Ward Members to act on another's behalf in the case of absence. This was something he could look into further, as well as the period of time to call-in applications. Regarding the concern of agent's relationships to Members, it would be the responsibility of the Member to declare the interest. He added that every Planning Authority had delegated powers as well as decisions made by the Planning Committee. Nationally approximately 90 percent were decided through delegated authority. He did not want to take powers away from Members but was aiming to be overtly fair.

Councillor J Geary responded that he was not suggesting that the way the system was run was unfair. He also suggested that the call-in period be extended to 10 days.

Councillor N Smith asked why the issue with advantages for agents had only just been raised when it was adequate 12 months ago, when the scheme was last reviewed. The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained that the issue had been building over previous months as complaints had been received, he felt that tightening the procedure would ease the issue and make it fair. Councillor N Smith commented that local people felt that they did not have a fair chance to air their views if applications were not considered at Planning Committee. The Head of Planning and Regeneration reminded Members that neighbours were notified and any representations received were considered by officers.

Councillor V Richichi stated that he would not tolerate discrimination against people who chose to work within the law. He felt that the agent in question was not given an advantage and should not be discriminated against just because he was hard working. He also felt that the Planning Committee were being told that they were not good enough to make certain decisions and that was distasteful. The Head of Planning and Regeneration clarified that the proposal was not discriminating but attempted to avoid giving anyone an advantage, even if accidentally. He added that if Members were not in agreement with the proposed triggers then he would happily look into it further.

Councillor D Harrison commented that he would prefer it if the Head of Planning and Regeneration had another look at the proposals and suggested that a briefing be held with the Planning Committee Members for further discussions.

Councillor N Clarke commented that he had sympathy for the situation with the agent in question as the circumstances meant we were accidentally unfair but even if he was given an unintentional advantage, it did not look good for the authority. He suggested that the wording be changed so that his applications only be considered by Planning Committee if they were recommended for approval. He also felt that the proposal for the trigger of 10 objections was too high, especially for rural areas.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration stated that he was happy to look into everything that had been put forward by Members.

As the general feeling from the discussion was that Members did not support the recommendations, the Chairman asked the Head of Planning and Regeneration to reconsider the proposals and discuss them with Members of the Planning Committee before bringing the report back to the Policy Development Group in September. Members agreed.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The Head of Planning and Regeneration reconsider the proposals taking into account comments made by Members.
- b) The Head of Planning and Regeneration to meet with the Members of Planning Committee to discuss the proposals before bringing a report back to Policy Development Group in September.

## **8. THE BALANCE OF THE LOCAL ECONOMY IN NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE**

In agreement with the Chairman, the Business Portfolio holder addressed the committee giving an overview of the report.

The Economic Development Officer gave a presentation to the Committee, highlighting the key points of the report.

Councillor N Smith asked if there was a policy of working with schools and colleges to address the skill shortage. The Economic Development Officer explained that she worked closely with schools and businesses, as well as parents to ensure advice was given where needed. Councillor N Smith felt it was important to provide guidance to young people.

Councillor T Eynon was pleased to have the data available as it was good to understand what was happening with the economy locally, however she asked for clearer figures in the future rather than an average. She highlighted the gap in earnings and raised

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concerns regarding the amount of underemployment. She suggested that the transport to work data be fed into the Local Plan and asked that a report be brought to Committee periodically.

It was moved by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor D Harrison and

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

## **9. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Interim Director of Resources informed Members that the Council Delivery Plan fitted into the Committee's existing meeting schedule, but due to the reporting timeframe the End of Year Report currently could not be considered by the Policy Development Group prior to Council. Therefore he was looking into the most appropriate way to report the information to Policy Development Group Members.

Councillor T Eynon felt that it was unfortunate that due to the scheduling of the meetings, the Policy Development Group seemed to be unable to scrutinise the big cabinet decisions such as the leisure services review. She asked officers to have a serious look into the meeting schedule to ensure significant decisions were considered by the Policy Development Group prior to Cabinet.

Councillor J Geary reiterated the comments of Councillor T Eynon and requested that officers also consider the addition of more meetings in the schedule to ease the size of the agendas, as well as ensuring two large agenda meetings were not on consecutive evenings.

The Interim Director of Resources took the comments on board and agreed to look into the matter further.

RESOLVED THAT:

The following items be placed on the work plan:

- a) Review of the Planning Committee Scheme of Delegations
- b) Review of Housing Allocations Policy
- c) Council Delivery Plan
- d) Budget Report

Councillor P Purver left the meeting at 7.30pm.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 9.00 pm

Chairman's signature