

MINUTES of a meeting of the POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 10 JANUARY 2018

Present: Councillor M Specht (Chairman)

Councillors N Clarke, T Eynon, J Geary, D Harrison, G Hault, P Purver, V Richichi, A C Saffell and N Smith

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

Portfolio Holders: Councillors R D Bayliss and T J Pendleton

Officers: J Arnold, Ms T Ashe, Ms K Greenbank, Mr G Jones, Mr C Lambert, Mr J Newton, Mr D Scruton, Mrs R Wallace and Miss E Warhurst

**26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**27. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Members declared the following interests:

Councillor J Geary declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 7, Draft Capital Programmes 2018/19 – 2022/23 as it referred to Owen Street Recreation Ground, which he visited regularly as a supporter of Coalville Town Football Club.

**28. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

No questions were received.

**29. MINUTES**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017.

Councillor J Geary expressed his disappointment that the item in respect of gas supply in rural areas had been deferred to the next meeting again as it had been on the work plan for 18 months. He asked that officers ensure the attendance of a representative at the next meeting. The Chairman shared Councillor J Geary's disappointment as there were people within the district that were living in fuel poverty and he felt it was an important issue.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor D Harrison and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**30. DEVELOPING THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

The Financial Planning Team Manager presented the report and referred Members to appendix one which outlined the current financial issues facing the Council to be addressed through the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Chairman's initials

In response to a question from Councillor T Eynon, the Financial Planning Team Manager explained that the report did not contain financial figures because when it was initially sent to Cabinet it was an outline document only and the figures were not yet available. The full report would be considered by Cabinet on 6 February and Council on 27 February. Councillor T Eynon expressed her disappointment that reports were still not being presented to the Policy Development Group prior to Cabinet even though she had raised the issue on many occasions.

Councillor T Eynon asked if owners of unoccupied business properties were still required to pay business rates, in the same way residential property owners were required to. The Financial Planning Team Manager stated that she would need to seek information from the Leicestershire Partnership and would provide a response outside of the meeting.

It was moved by Councillor D Harrison, seconded by Councillor V Richichi and

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The report be noted.
- b) The comments made be fed back to Cabinet when considering the report on 6 February 2018.

### **31. DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS, GENERAL FUND AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT**

The Financial Planning Team Manager presented the report to Members and highlighted the proposal to not increase council tax for the ninth year. She also informed Members that the Performance Working Group had met earlier in the day to discuss the proposals and comments received were positive.

Councillor J Geary referred to the forecast reduction in CCTV income and asked for further details as to why this was. The Financial Planning Team Manager agreed to provide the information outside of the meeting.

Regarding the Housing Revenue Account rent budgets, Councillor J Geary asked why only 58 percent of properties were at their target rent at the end of October 2017. The Director of Housing explained that when rent targets were introduced nationally, the Council decided to maintain rent at a lower level rather than making increases as other local authorities had, this meant that NWLDC was behind with targets. Now that the Government has stopped local authorities from increasing rent, NWLDC were unable to close the gap.

Councillor D Harrison felt that maintaining zero percent increase in council tax for nine continuous years was a real achievement and was something to be proud of.

Councillor T Eynon raised concerns regarding the potential shortfalls identified for the future and the need for refinancing to address it. The Director of Housing explained that there were many financial variables over the next 25 years and the Council would be paying off significant amounts over the time period. He reassured Members that it was normal practice to refinance and officers were comfortable with the proposals. He added that the figures in front of Members indicated the worst scenario.

Councillor N Smith commented that it was difficult to know what financial position the Council would be in in 25 years' time and was therefore happy with the response from the

Director of Housing. He also shared Councillor D Harrison's views on the zero percent increase in council tax and was especially proud that all services had still been retained.

It was moved by Councillor D Harrison, seconded by Councillor V Richichi and

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The report be noted.
- b) The comments made be fed back to Cabinet when considering the report on 6 February 2018.

### **32. DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMMES 2018/19 - 2022/23**

The Financial Planning Team Manager presented the report to Members. It was noted that the proposed extensions to Lindon Way depot and finance review as detailed would be subject to a future report to Cabinet. She also informed Members that the Performance Working Group had met earlier in the day to discuss the proposals and comments received were positive.

Councillor T Eynon raised concerns regarding the elevator in the council offices as it was very outdated. She also felt that the access around the building in general prevented people from attending meetings as no more than two wheelchair users could be on the first floor at one time. She asked if this would be looked at as part of the capital programme. The Director of Housing explained that he was aware of the issue as the elevator was coming to the end of its natural life. He assured Members that it was being looked at as part of a number of improvements but no plans had been made yet.

Councillor V Richichi felt that a £60,000 budget for mowers was too much and asked if this was an actual cost or an estimation. The Financial Planning Team Manager agreed to gain some further information and let Councillor V Richichi have a response outside of the meeting. Councillor V Richichi asked for a list of costings for all of the equipment they were purchasing.

Regarding the Lindon Way workshop extension, Councillor N Clarke understood discussions were being had relating to buying an additional vehicle rather than buying bigger replacement vehicles, therefore the extension would not be required. The Financial Planning Team Manager believed that it was the additional cost of manning an additional vehicle that made the decision to follow the extension route but would investigate and provide a response outside of the meeting.

Councillor J Geary questioned why money was being put aside to make improvements to plumbing that was still running at Hermitage Leisure Centre when it has been agreed to build a new leisure facility. The Director of Housing explained that the pipework and tank referred to would not be replaced whilst it was still operational but as it was coming to the end of its lifespan, it was necessary to budget for replacement in case it was required.

It was moved by Councillor D Harrison, seconded by Councillor V Richichi and

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The report be noted.
- b) The comments made be fed back to Cabinet when considering the report on 6 February 2018.

### 33. DRAFT COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN

The Head of Legal and Support Services presented the report to Members, drawing Members attention to the new format to enhance the key points and for clarity of reading.

In response to a question from Councillor G Hoult, the Director of Housing explained that a local housing/trading company was being set up to allow the council to do a number of things that it could not currently do as a local authority, for example sell services to businesses outside of the council.

Councillor V Ricichi questioned the viability of the frontage grants for businesses in Coalville. He gave an example of the Former Litton Tree Public House building which had received a grant but had made no improvements, as well as the bus station. He suggested that all businesses in the town be given a business tax break instead so that all benefit. The Head of Economic Development responded that she had been in contact with the owner of the Litton Tree Public House to encourage them to make improvements. She added that the bus station had not received a grant for frontage improvements. They had however received a business grant which would be returned if the regeneration project did not progress.

Regarding the task to give customers the ability to access transactions on line 24 hours a day, Councillor T Eynon was concerned that it would exclude people and suggested it was monitored. However, she was pleased that a key task for 2018-19 was to develop a health and well-being strategy. She also commented on whether the Good Design Guide for housing developments would address accessibility.

Councillor N Smith raised concerns on the number of very small properties that were being built with very small bedrooms and asked if there was anything that could be done to influence the developers to build family sized homes. The Head of Planning and Regeneration stated that the Local Plan set out the range of housing needed and planning policy also backed it up. He explained that it was easy to influence developers on larger developments. He added that there was no longer a National Space Standard and it was the decision of the authority to set the minimum size of rooms. This was not set at the moment but as the Local Plan was being reviewed it was something that could be investigated. Councillor N Smith asked for this to be included in the review.

Regarding the task to ensure anti-social behaviour levels did not increase, even if crime increased in the next three years, Councillor N Clarke felt that the wording was contradictory. The Head of Legal and Support Services agreed to take the comment back to officers.

Regarding the task to formally launch the Good Design Guide, Councillor A C Saffell commented that the designs in the past were poor and the officer had brought in some good improvements, however the designs in some areas had lost the rural feel of the villages. He asked if the guide was based on the current Urban Designer's work. The Head of Planning Regeneration confirmed that it was. Councillor A C Saffell felt that there should be a rural design officer to retain the character of these rural areas in new developments.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The report be noted.

Chairman's initials

- b) The comments made be fed back to Cabinet when considering the report on 6 February 2018.

#### **34. CONTRACT FOR THE PROVISION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES - BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN COALVILLE PROJECT**

The Head of Economic Development presented the report, drawing Members attention to the key achievements throughout the contract. She welcomed the 'Coalville Heroes', Deana Wildgoose and Julia Burkin to the meeting and thanked them for all the hard work and energy that had gone into the project.

Councillor T Eynon praised the work undertaken, especially the famous fifty project as this gained the involvement of school children and featured in the press. She also thanked the Coalville Heroes for the amount of financial detail within their report as it clearly showed where funds had come from and how they had been spent. She believed that the contract had been a great investment and was good to see what had been achieved.

Councillor J Geary enjoyed reading the report and all the detail included. In reference to the redundant toilet block on Mantle Lane, Councillor J Geary reported that it had been broken into and hoped it would be fixed later in the week. He was also disappointed that there were so many negative comments in the young person survey as it was a shame to see that enthusiasm in the young had disappeared.

Council D Harrison complimented the project, he felt that the work undertaken on the ground level was first class and had been an enhancement for Coalville.

Councillor A C Saffell concurred with councillor D Harrison and hoped that it would continue.

Councillor N Smith asked if the young people survey was carried out in other areas so that comparative data was available. He felt it was important to find out if the views were shared across the district or just Coalville. Ms D Wildgoose reported that the survey was the first of its kind for the district but there was national statistics available if required. She would be happy to carry out surveys in other areas if the opportunity arose.

Councillor V Richichi echoed comments already made regarding the project and the great report. Regarding the results of the young people survey, he felt that it was important to gain their trust, then enthusiasm would build.

The Chairman congratulated the work undertaken and hoped that it would continue into the future. He added that after visiting the Coalville Heroes at their base in Coalville market it was clear to see the energy and enthusiasm that has been put into the project.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The outputs and outcomes achieved via the contract for the provision of community engagement activities for the Building Confidence in Coalville Project be noted.

#### **35. JOINT STRATEGIC GROWTH PLAN CONSULTATION**

The Head of Planning and Regeneration presented the report to Members, highlighting the key features of the draft growth plan. He reported that the consultation would run for 12 weeks and would include two consultation events within the district, the first being in Ashby.

Chairman's initials

Councillor T Eynon expressed her disappointment that Members did not have a physical copy of the draft plan due to the timing of the consultation and unfortunately the online document had still not been released. To be able to scrutinise the document thoroughly, she requested that the full draft growth plan be brought to the next meeting. The Head of Planning and Regeneration was happy, in principle, to bring the draft growth plan to the next meeting but he would need to check that the consultation deadlines would fit in with timescales. He suggested instead that an all Member briefing be arranged to look into the draft growth plan in more detail when the consultation has commenced. Members were happy with this suggestion.

Regarding the number of homes to be built per year, Councillor J Geary asked how many would be affordable homes, as Section 106 Agreements were often made by the developers regarding numbers and then not delivered. The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained that the target for affordable homes would be calculated and set by the Local Plan, and that the Strategic Growth Plan was intended to address how many new homes and jobs were expected to be needed between 2031 and 2050, and where best to build them, but not local detail.

Councillor J Geary commented that there was still no mention of re-using the Coalville to Burton railway line for mass transit, which was a shame as he felt it was needed. The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained that the consultation was a good opportunity to raise these type of comments, and noted that the Local Plan did support this in principle, if suitable proposals were to come forward, this would be fed back as he was aware it was a local aspiration.

At this point a heated discussion ensued between a number of Members, in response to a comment from the Chairman, regarding Planning Committee decisions and affordable homes, which due to its political nature was not relevant to the item being considered.

In response from a question from Cllr Clarke, the Head of Planning and Regeneration reported that the draft plan should be available to view on the website following the link within the report as of the following day.

Councillor P Purver asked if the major highway improvements could be undertaken sooner as they were really needed. The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained that the development of strategic roads was a lengthy process and took decades rather than months to plan. Due to this, unfortunately it was unlikely that the works would be undertaken any time soon.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

### **36. REVIEW OF HOUSING POLICIES**

The Head of Housing presented the report to Members, detailing the revisions to the Allocations Policy and the Former Tenants Arrears Policy. He also drew Members attention to an error on the front page of the report regarding equalities impact screening, it should read 'Equalities impact screenings have been completed for the two policies.'

Councillor T Eynon requested to see the equalities impact screenings as she would like further details regarding accessibility, as she believed people were being digitally excluded.

Chairman's initials

Councillor N Clarke asked what the advantages were for moving away from a sub-regional scheme. The Head of Housing explained that it made the process easier for people moving across Leicestershire.

Councillor N Clarke commented that he often saw his constituents struggling to use the choice based lettings system as it was difficult to use on a mobile phone, plus the process was lengthy, especially when calculating the banding. The Head of Housing stated that the team were always looking for ways to improve the bidding process and the move to a new software supplier should also help. The Strategic Housing Team Manager explained that the current ICT software had been in place since 2010 and was a little outdated, hence the move to a new ICT platform. He added that under the new policy, banding assessments would be clearer but the team would be happy to assist people where needed, either in person or over the telephone.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The report be noted.
- b) The comments made be fed into Cabinet when considering the report on 6 February 2018.

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

Councillor T Eynon pointed out that the meetings of Cabinet were generally the same week as the Policy Development Group meetings and therefore it was difficult to scrutinise items before considered by Cabinet.

She informed Members that the Communities and Local Government Select Committee were considering a report written by a professor at Demontfort University regarding the effectiveness of scrutiny. She believed that the Policy Development Group would find the report useful for opening discussion about the way forward for the Committee and requested it be placed on the work programme.

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The Draft Strategic Growth Plan be placed on the work programme for the next meeting.
- b) The report on effective scrutiny which was being considered by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee be placed on the work programme.

Councillor A C Saffell left the meeting at 7.39pm.

Councillor N Smith left the meeting at 8.00pm.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.20 pm