

ITEM 4

Time commenced - 6.00 pm

Time finished - 8.15 pm

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION 19 NOVEMBER 2008

Present: Councillor Graves (in the Chair)
Councillors Bolton, Hird, F Khan, Poulter and Webb

In attendance Councillors Carr, Care, Jennings, Jones and Troup

73/08 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Batey and Hussain

74/08 Late items introduced by the Chair

There were no late items

75/08 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of Interest.

76/08 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 29 September and 21 October 2008 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendment.

To include Councillor Bayliss in the list of people in attendance at the meeting held on 21 October 2008.

77/08 Call in

There were no items called in.

Items for Discussion

78/08 Petition Against Cityscape Proposals for Osnabruck Square and Tennant Street

The Commission received an update on the latest position in regard to the petition received relating to proposals for Osnabruck Square and Tennant Street. There were three main issues relating to vehicular access around Quad, loading bay and the indicative plans for the Orangery. Various questions had been raised by the market traders and another meeting would be held once all the responses had been received.

Resolved to receive a further report at a future meeting.

79/08 Derby City Partnership – Sustainable Community Strategy

The Commission considered a report which stated that Derby City Partnership were in the process of updating Derby's Sustainable Community Strategy – Our Vision 2020. Clare Labram and Katrina Crookdale from Derby City Partnership attended the meeting.

Resolved

- 1. To note the results of the consultation**
- 2. To send any comments on the proposed amendments to Katrina Crookdale by 25 November 2008.**

80/08 Forward Plan Item 64/07 – Approval of Capital Funding for works carried out under the Building Act 1984

The Commission considered a resolution from Council Cabinet setting details of an approval for capital funding to meet the costs of carrying out remedial work to defective sewers in the Wilkins Drive area, Allenton.

Resolved to note the report.

81/08 Growth Point – Refresh of Programme of Development Derby Housing Market Area

The Commission considered a report which stated that the Government designated the Three Cities and Three Counties (6Cs) area as a Growth Point in 2006. The 6Cs encompassed the sub regional Housing Market Areas (HMAs) of Leicester, Nottingham and Derby, the Derby HMA covering the City, South Derbyshire and Amber Valley. The report set out the latest position in relation to the refresh.

Resolved to note the report.

82/08 Forward Plan 39/08 – Closure of the Cash Office in the Council House

The Commission considered a report which was to be considered by Council Cabinet at its meeting on 25 November 2008. Commission Members expressed mixed views about the proposals and there was some concern about the possible impact of the proposal changes on some of the most vulnerable sectors of Derby's population. The Commission agreed with recommendations 2.1 and 2.2 of the report.

Resolved

- 1. To recommend Council Cabinet to approve recommendations 2.1 and 2.2 of the report.**
- 2. To recommend that the date of the final closure of the cashiers' service be**

reassessed in January 2009 when the extent to which existing users had moved to other forms of payment should be readily apparent.

3. To recommend that an update report on progress with the proposals is provided to the Scrutiny Management Commission meeting in January 2009.

83/08 Budget Scrutiny Pre Briefing

The Commission considered a report on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2009/10 – 2011-12.

The Chair had invited Councillor Jones, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Carr, the Cabinet member for Direct and Internal Services, and the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Commissions who were not members of the Scrutiny Management Commission to attend the meeting.

In addition to the overview of budget pressures provided by the Director of Resources, a briefing on the budget pressures faced by the departments responsible for the different aspects of the Scrutiny Management Commission's portfolio was provided to members by:

- The Assistant Director of Environmental Services – Local Environment
- The Director of Regeneration and Community
- The Director of Corporate and Adult Services

Councillor Jones said that she had nothing to add to the Director of Resources report. She confirmed that she had met with the leaders of the other political groups to discuss the budget and budget strategy and anticipated this might be the first of several such meetings. The Chair agreed on the need for a formal agreement between all parties on the budget strategy.

Having considered the report Commission members and the other Members present at the meeting commented on the proposals. The points they raised together with the response of the appropriate Director or Assistant Director are summarised below:

1. **Parks asset management:** Members were concerned that public toilets in parks might be closed to save money. A member referred to the buildings in Markeaton Park and asked about the plans for them. Comment was also made about the poor condition of some play areas and about the potential for health and safety issues to arise if play area equipment was not properly maintained. The Assistant Director - Local Environment confirmed that there were no proposals to close public toilets in the parks and said that play areas were inspected and any safety issues arising from the inspections were dealt with. Members were told that bids for funding for parks had been made and it was confirmed that no other play area closures were currently proposed. The Assistant Director mentioned that consideration was being given to a rationalisation of the Council's depots on Stores Road and London Road and in response to a question from a Commission member said that he was not aware of any current proposals to market London Road

The Assistant Director was asked about empty cafe in the Arboretum and which it was said had stood empty for over 12 months. The Assistant Director confirmed that the lease on the property had been offered but there had been no takers.

2. **Catering Service:** In response to a question from a Commission member the Assistant Director – Local Environment confirmed that the Catering Services was running at a substantial loss and said that the opportunity had been taken to bid for funds to review the service. He said that a consultant had been engaged and a report would be provided to Council Cabinet.

The Chair suggested that to address the falling take up of school meals the Council might consider giving free meals to young children. It was suggested that this would introduce the children and their parents to the concept of having school meals and they might continue to do so as they got older.

3. **Fleet Management:** In response to a question the Assistant Director confirmed that action was being taken to achieve the environmental targets for the Council's vehicle fleet. He said that biofuels were being used as much as possible and that driver training had been effective in reducing fuel consumption. The Assistant Director said that there was the potential to roll out the improved driving techniques to the Council's grey fleet drivers.
4. **Funding and charges:** The Director of Regeneration and Community referred to potential budget pressures arising because external funding streams were changing or coming to an end. A Commission member expressed the view that this was increasingly becoming an issue. It was suggested that such issues could be foreseen and that with planning, sustainability or an exit strategy could be developed. Further figures on the extent of external funding issues were requested. The Director of Regeneration and Community confirmed that funding issues were being examined and said he could provide figures on this if required.
5. **Area and Neighbourhood funding:** In response to a question the Director of Regeneration and Community told members that the funding for Neighbourhood Boards had been provided as part of a pilot scheme but there was no provision in the draft budget proposals to extend this funding. He said if the funding was continued then savings would have to be found elsewhere. It was the general view of the Commission that the funding was important and that it should be maintained. The Director of Resources said that this was a view which could be fed into the next budget report to Council Cabinet.

Councillor Jones told the Commission that she had discussed the funding issue with Andy Thomas, Acting Director – Derby Community Safety Partnership, and had asked for feedback on performance. Councillor Jones agreed that a devolved budget was important.

A Commission member said that it did not seem that Neighbourhood Boards had been able to retain any savings that they made on their budgets and felt this was wrong. Another member said that he felt the 'spend it or lose it' approach caused problems for the Boards. Councillor Jones agreed to take this issue back to Cabinet and to explore it further.

The Chair suggested that some of the Highways Maintenance budget might be devolved to Neighbourhood Boards. The Director of Regeneration and Community said that the issue was one of getting the best value for the money and pointed out that this was an issue that would be considered by the Planning and Transportation Commission in its forthcoming review.

6. **East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) funding:** A Commission member expressed the view that Derby needed to get its fair share of EMDA funding. In response the Director of Regeneration and Community said that he felt Derby had received a very reasonable settlement from EMDA.
7. **Friargate Studios:** A Commission member asked what was being done to increase the occupancy of Friargate Studios. The Director of Regeneration and Community told the Commission that although the situation had seemed good earlier this year it had now declined due to the economic downturn. He said that EMDA had been approached with regard to renegotiating the agreement.
8. **Planning Section workload:** A Commission member asked what action was being taken to address the downturn in planning applications resulting from the economic situation. The Director of Regeneration and Community confirmed that there had been a reduction in the number of planning applications received and said that this affected the Development Control and Building Control teams. He told the Commission that he was undertaking a review of staffing resources and looking at opportunities to freeze vacancies and to redeploy staff where appropriate. The Director confirmed that competition from private organisations was affecting the Building Control Services and they were ending up with the more complex applications.

The Chair suggested that with the downturn in planning applications it might be an option to reduce the number of Planning Control Committee meetings and the Director said he would consider this.

9. **Markets:** A Commission member asked whether there were any plans to amalgamate the markets. The Director of Corporate and Adult Services pointed out that market traders were lease holders and said there was a need for the Council to be aware of the financial implications of any proposals. Another Commission member asked about the possibility of amalgamating the wholesale and cattle markets and in response Councillor Carr said that the cattle market was currently profiting from the closure of Uttoxeter cattle market and was doing well.

The Director of Corporate and Adult Services told the Commission that the markets were a net contributor to the Councils finances and if their contribution was removed a replacement source of income would need to be found. The Chair pointed out that Councils had suffered from sell offs in the past. Councillor Carr confirmed there were no plans to amalgamate the markets, although there was a worrying level of void properties. The Director of Corporate and Adult Services told the Commission that although there were voids, Derby was still doing better than most other local authorities.

10. **Property maintenance:** A Commission member commented on the higher cost of bringing a property back into service once it had been closed down and said

there was a need to invest in the Council's building stock. In response the Director of Corporate and Adult Services said that the current approach was to try and 'fix it if it fails' and that very little planned maintenance was being carried out. He said health and safety was a priority but there was for example no painting being done and that this would result in problems in the future. The Director gave the example of St Helen's House and said that sources of funding were found other buildings would follow the same path.

The Chair summarised the outcomes of the meeting and referred to the different issues that had been discussed. The Chair said that he did not consider that it was the job of the Scrutiny Commissions to suggest where savings could be made and he felt that their role was to comment on proposals. However it was the view of the Commission that they should recommend to Council Cabinet that the provision of funding for Neighbourhood Boards should be incorporated into the 2009/10 budget proposals.

Resolved to recommend Council Cabinet to incorporate funding for Neighbourhood Boards in the 2009/10 budget proposals.

84/08 Arrangements for the First Bi-Annual Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Meeting

The Commission considered a report setting out the arrangements for the first bi-annual meeting of Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs to be held on 25 November 2008.

Resolved to note the report.

85/08 Performance Eye

The Commission considered a report which gave details of the first meeting of the Performance Support Group which took place on 9 October 2008.

Resolved to note the report and the linkage between the Performance Support Group and the Commissions.

86/08 Work Plan 2008/09

The Commission considered a report which stated that the General Licensing Committee at its meeting on 15 October 2008 agreed to undertake a review of the Council's Licensing Policy and as part of that review to ask this Commission to examine the way in which the Licensing Policy is enforced. The report set out the proposed scope for the review of the Council's Licensing Policy.

Resolved to approve the scoping report.

87/08 Forward Plan

No items from the Forward Plan were identified for scrutiny.

88/08 Retrospective Scrutiny

The Commission did not request any items for retrospective scrutiny.

The Commission considered a report on the Council Cabinet Key and Budget and Policy Framework decisions 2 September 2008 to 28 October 2008. The Commission Members would contact the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination Officers prior to meeting if they wanted reports on particular items.

Resolved to note the report.

89/08 Matters Referred to the Commission by Council Cabinet

There were no matters referred to the Commission by Council Cabinet.

90/08 Responses of Council Cabinet to the Recommendations and reports of the Commission

The Commission noted the response of the Council Cabinet to the Commissions recommendations on Gayton Pool.

Chair of the next ensuing meeting
at which these minutes were signed