

ECONOMY, TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Lewes on 30 September 2015.

PRESENT Councillors Richard Stogdon (Chair), Mike Pursglove (Vice Chair), Claire Dowling, John Hodges, Pat Rodohan and Barry Taylor

LEAD MEMBERS Councillor David Elkin (Lead Member for Resources)
Councillor Carl Maynard (Lead Member for Transport and Environment)
Councillor Rupert Simmons (Lead Member for Economy)

ALSO PRESENT Becky Shaw, Chief Executive
Rupert Clubb, Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
Becky Shaw, Chief Executive
James Harris, Assistant Director, Economy
Nick Skelton, Assistant Director Communities
Karl Taylor, Assistant Director Operations

11 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 JULY 2015

11.1 The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 1 July 2015 were agreed.

11.2 RESOLVED to approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2015.

12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

12.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor St Pierre.

13 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

13.1 Councillor Dowling declared a personal interest in item 5 (see Minute 16) in that she is a Member of Wealden District Council, but she did not consider this to be prejudicial.

13.2 Councillor Hodges declared a personal interest in item 5 (see Minute 16) in that he is a Director of Let's Do Business, but he did not consider this to be prejudicial.

13.3 Councillor Maynard declared a personal interest in item 5 (see Minute 16) in that he is the Leader of Rother District Council, but he did not consider this to be prejudicial.

13.4 Councillor Rodohan declared a personal interest in item 6 (see Minute 17) in that he is a member of the Federation of Small Businesses, but he did not consider this to be prejudicial.

14 URGENT ITEMS

14.1 Councillor Dowling requested consideration be given to the Community Safety Strategy annual report, which had been looked at by the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, with particular regard to Road Safety.

15 REPORTS

15.1 Reports referred to in the minutes below are contained in the minute book.

16 RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR) 2015/16

16.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive. The Lead Member for Resources confirmed that no budget was exempt from investigation for potential savings. The Chief Executive highlighted changes to the financial landscape that had occurred since the Whole Council Forum, namely the delay in the implementation of aspects of the Care Act, and the announcement of the National Living Wage commitment, with its potential impacts on construction and care contracts.

16.2 The Committee noted the areas of search for savings and recommended that the diagram in appendix 1 of the report should contain a reference to Business Growth as part of the Council's One Council Plans. The Committee further recommended that Income Generation is added for the Communities, Economy and Transport (CET) Department. It was acknowledged that other Scrutiny Committees had expressed similar views for portfolios within their area of responsibility. There was a discussion as to what sectors the County Council can most effectively focus on, given the constraints on local authorities trading for profit, and the areas in which the County Council is the principal provider. The Committee felt it was important to highlight that funds raised would be spent for the benefit of the local community.

16.3 The Committee commented that it will be difficult to review the savings plans for the CET Department as a whole, without some indication of the contribution being made by the Libraries and Information Service as part of the areas of search. The work of the Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee was highlighted, as was the report to the Cabinet due later in the year.

16.4 The Committee expressed concern that the combined Council revenue expenditure in regard to Governance Services, Business Services, Contingencies and Corporate Services is in excess of the entire budget for CET (including Libraries). While it was noted that the preceding concern did not take account of substantive capital expenditure, the fact remains that the impending budget reductions will very severely affect future revenue expenditure.

16.5 The Committee commented on the premises and business services costs for CET and asked if these costs will be reduced as the Spaces Programme, Agile, Orbis and other initiatives are implemented. It was confirmed that the whole Council estate was under review.

16.6 The Committee discussed the Road Safety section of the Transport and Environment portfolio plan. In particular the Committee noted the Killed and Seriously Injured (KSI) reduction target and work done with partners, such as the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership, to address the root causes of KSIs. Investigation of KSI accidents has shown 90% are attributable to driver error. The effectiveness of proposed safety measures was discussed, to ensure schemes provide a measurable impact on the KSI figures even in the potential absence of enforcement by the Police, given their prioritisation of resources. The importance of evidence-based prioritisation was stressed. The proposed joint scrutiny work with the Audit, Best Value and

Community Services Scrutiny Committee, to review the Public Health investment in Road Safety, was highlighted.

16.7 The Waste PFI Contract was recognised as a major area of expenditure for the Department. The Committee questioned whether sufficient savings or efficiencies could be delivered by the Waste Contract, given that recycling rates were falling. It was recognised that under performance in recycling rates represents a risk to the Council and the CET revenue budget. The different approaches of the County's collection authorities were commented on as was income generation through treating waste as a resource, including use as refuse derived fuel, together with the markets available for recyclables.

16.8 The Committee discussed the Economy portfolio plan and welcomed the positive performance indicators on Job Seekers' Allowance claimants and the speed at which average income per household is rising. The success of the You're Hired campaign, and its appropriation by other local authorities was commented on.

16.9 The success of the Broadband project was welcomed, by the Committee, as was news of further investment secured for engineering and the development of an approach to the SELEP regarding 4G and covering existing mobile black spots. The crucial part that reliable internet access plays in supporting businesses, addressing health inequalities and reducing the need for travel was stressed by the Committee.

16.10 RESOLVED (1) to note the report; and

(2) to establish an RPPR Board consisting of all available Committee Members to consider the developing portfolio plans and savings proposals.

17 ECONOMIC INTERVENTION FUND AND BUSINESS GROWTH FUNDING

17.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport. The Assistant Director Economy set out the key features of the report including the creation of 900 new jobs, the cost per job created, the focus on those indigenous companies with high growth potential ('gazelles'), and the efforts made to attract businesses to re-locate to East Sussex.

17.2 The Department keeps a close eye on the long term impacts of intervention through the reporting required by central Government. Applicants are required to produce a business case and attend an interview, and to set out the number and salary ranges of the jobs to be created. These are then included in the contractual terms agreed by the applicant and the County Council.

17.3 The Committee agreed that increased publicity for the Council's interventions, particularly for local Members, would be beneficial. It was made clear that the local member would not be part of the decision making process for accepting an application, but would be notified of successful bids, in order to act as ambassadors to other businesses who might benefit from the County Council's aid. The Committee suggested that successful applicants should also be asked to act as ambassadors.

17.4 The Assistant Director welcomed the suggestions of the Committee as to how to engage most effectively with the business community, as it was acknowledged that not all business are associated with a Chamber of Commerce or similar umbrella organisation. It was suggested that an enclosure could be included with the annual business rate demand.

17.5 The Assistant Director reassured the Committee that bids with obvious potential, but which failed to meet the criteria, will be referred to other organisations to help develop the business plan and to support a re-submission of the bid.

17.6 The Committee discussed the manufacturing sector, with its strong base in the Hastings area and engineering companies in Wealden, which are linked to the skills development initiatives at the County's universities and colleges. The Committee also noted the expected outputs from the Social Business Investment Fund, which are different to the other funds with its focus on safeguarding existing jobs and apprentice/volunteer training.

17.7 RESOLVED to (1) note the report; and

(2) congratulate all the officers involved with the Economic Intervention Fund and Business Growth funding.

18 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

18.1 The Committee considered the work programme for the year ahead, including: the Boards established for scrutiny of the rights of way strategic commissioning project and gully emptying/drainage; the report due in March on the mitigation measures put in place to offset the impacts of the reformulated supported bus network; and the feasibility of a meeting to consider the Highways Contract Re-procurement Project before its consideration by Cabinet.

18.2 The Committee discussed the Library Transformation project, and the desirability of seeing the full figures, to allow the Scrutiny Committee to see the full picture of the Communities, Economy and Transport budget so that any impacts of budget reductions can be accurately assessed. The project is under scrutiny by the Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee, and will be the subject of a report to the Cabinet later in the year. The Committee was invited to work together with ABVCS.

18.3 RESOLVED to note the Plan and work of the forthcoming Board meetings.

19 FORWARD PLAN

19.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan.

19.2 RESOLVED to note the Plan.

20 ANY OTHER ITEMS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED UNDER AGENDA ITEM 4

20.1 The Committee considered a briefing note prepared by Councillor Dowling, a copy of which is included in the Minute Book.

20.2 The Committee discussed the aims and objectives of the Community Safety Partnership in relation to road safety, and were informed of the officer representation on the Partnership and Boards. The Committee expressed a desire to add their voice to the discussion of the formulation of the Strategy.

20.3 RESOLVED to consider the road safety section of the Community Safety Strategy annual report at its meeting in September 2016.

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm.

Councillor Richard Stogdon
Chair