

HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL – PLACES

held in the Council Chamber,
Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough

16th June 2011

Present:
Councillor King (Chairman)

Councillors: Dr. Bremner (Ex Officio), Brodrick, Dewes, Hallam,
Mrs. Simpson, Mrs. Tooley and Mrs. Wood.

Officers: M. Bradford, B. Jolly, E. O'Neill and N. Proudfoot.

Portfolio Holders: Councillors Mrs. Ackerley and Charlish.

59 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE COUNCIL YEAR 2011/12

Councillor Dr. Bremner, Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission, invited nominations for Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel for Places for the 2011/12 year.

It was moved by Councillor Brodrick and seconded by Councillor Dewes that Councillor King be elected as Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel – Places for the Council year 2011/12.

There being no other nominations, it was RESOLVED that Councillor King be elected as Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel – Places for the Council year 2011/12.

60 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE COUNCIL YEAR 2011/12

It was moved by Councillor King and seconded by Councillor Dewes that Councillor Brodrick be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel – Places for the Council year 2011/12.

There being no other nominations, it was RESOLVED that Councillor Brodrick be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel – Places for the Council year 2011/12.

61 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTIONS

None were received.

62 MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Panel – Places held on 14th April 2011 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

63 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

None were received.

64 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' END-OF-YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORTS

Three Portfolio Holders report to the Scrutiny Panel – People. These are: Waste and Recycling (Councillor Charlish), Housing Infrastructure and Planning (Councillor Mrs. Ackerley) and Local Business, Enterprise and Legal Services (Councillor Rook). The Portfolio Holders presented their End-of-Year Performance Reports for the year 2010/11 and invited questions from the Panel.

The Portfolio Holders' reports contained the following categories: Achievements, Current Work in Progress, Areas of Concern, Key Performance Indicators and Topical Issues.

A summary of the discussions on each Portfolio is provided below.

i)Waste and Recycling

The Panel NOTED that:

- (i) the report stated that a figure of 0% was recorded as an indication of litter found in the District. This figure is calculated using a standard, national method designed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
- (ii) the newly-created Waste Participation Officers had contributed to the Council's increased recycling rates.
- (iii) waste to landfill has reduced since the introduction of the food waste service.
- (iv) central government's target is to create a zero-carbon future.
- (v) recycling rates increased by 3-4% on the previous year.
- (vi) the waste team generated £1,273,000 of income. Income generated is used to off-set the cost of the service.
- (vii) the Council's Open Spaces Strategy has been developed by the Open Spaces Task Panel and is due to come to the Executive for adoption shortly.
- (viii) the Council organises community-based litter-picks at which both Council Members and volunteers collect litter in their communities.
- (ix) electricity usage in the Council offices had reduced by 25% on the previous year.
- (x) the Council is currently reviewing how to make the most efficient use of the floor space of the Council Offices following the departure/relocation of some of the Council's teams.
- (xi) A pilot for Council Office waste recycling is currently underway. This will involve the removal of under-desk bins and the implementation of in-house, centralised recycling locations.
- (xii) plastic recycling may become compulsory within the next two to three years.
- (xiii) landfill tax is likely to be abolished within two years.
- (xiv) Plans to renovate Welland Park tennis courts are contingent on the success of funding bids which are currently being prepared. If these funding bids are successful work is expected to commence before the end of 2011.

The Panel RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) Members be emailed with details of the Defra litter calculation model.
- (ii) Members be emailed with figures on how much waste to landfill has reduced since the introduction of the food waste service.

ii)Housing, Infrastructure and Planning

The Panel NOTED that:

- (i) the Council's Harborough Home Search Officers performed extremely well during the recent changes to their working environment. All existing clients were transferred to a new county-wide software system and the team moved offices (from the Adam and Eve Street Office into the main Council Offices).
- (ii) the Council's Local Development Framework Core Strategy had been produced and submitted for Public Examination. Any persons wishing to make comment should do so through the Council's Programme Officer (telephone: 01858 821014 or email: j.strachan@harborough.gov.uk).
- (iii) a Briefing Note is currently being prepared to advise Members about Social Housing (non-Seven-Locks Housing). This will be published before the end of June 2011.
- (iv) an Executive Task Panel has been created to advise on the implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Section 106 agreements continue to be used in the meantime (Section 106 will be able to be used until 2014).

iii)Local Business and Enterprise

The Panel NOTED that:

- (i) the Harborough Innovation Centre has now been completed.

The Panel RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) Members be given the opportunity to visit, and/or be given a tour of, the Harborough Innovation Centre.

65 PUBLIC TOILET PROVISION

This item was brought to Scrutiny as a result of Council Minute 275 2010/11, as set out below:

275 - WRITTEN QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

A petition was presented by Councillor Johnson regarding the closure of the public toilets in the Market Hall, Market Harborough. Councillor Johnson reported that the petition contained 3,514 signatories from residents in Market Harborough and from 36 other areas, including a significant number from Northamptonshire. The main reasons behind the petition were:-

- There had been no footfall surveys undertaken
- The closure was an affront to dignity and commonsense
- Councillors were responsible for working with the people they represented and this petition was representative of the views of the people affected.
- The Leader had refused to listen to those people who would be particularly affected by the closure.
- St. Mary's place was the flagship shopping area of the town to which people gravitated and this area would now be without a public convenience.
- There was a thriving market hall cafe with now no nearby toilet facilities as was the situation with the bus station
- Tight bus schedules would not allow people time to get to the Commons Car park toilet.
- It would involve people, including disabled, crossing busy roads to Commons Car Park toilet.
- 3,500 signatures cannot be wrong and closure was a backwards step.

In response, Councillor Spendlove-Mason, Portfolio Holder, apologised to those residents most affected by the closure, however he emphasised that the Council had a responsibility to set a balanced budget to discharge its responsibilities. He explained that a year ago, the Council had to reduce its revenue costs and a list of activities was presented to the Executive. The provision of public conveniences was not a statutory provision and the total cost to the Council of keeping all the toilets open was £120,000 per year. After much debate, the Executive had made the decision to close four of those and save £50,000 and therefore a balanced budget had been achieved without having to close all of the toilets or put jobs at risk.

Furthermore, the impact of further cuts from the Revenue Fund to be announced by the new coalition Government was as yet unknown and whilst acknowledging the efforts that had been made previously by the opposition party, he suggested that they might like to come up with ideas/suggestions for further savings to reduce further revenue demands on the council.

Councillor Rook added that this was the second petition that had been received in respect of this matter and after it was presented previously, he had promised that he would take it back to Executive to re-examine and this had been done. The Council had been placed in a position where it had to make cuts and even greater financial pressures would be placed on the Council within the next few months. The opposition party would be involved in working on a choice based budget. He accepted that 3,500 signatures was a significant amount but this did not change the situation the Council faced as the savings were still desperately needed. However, he confirmed that if the opposition party came up with some alternative solutions with robust cases, he would ask the Executive to look at the issue again.

A motion was proposed by Councillor Pain and seconded by Councillor Dunton that a complete review of the District's Public Conveniences be undertaken in the light of the proposals contained within the Core Spatial Strategy with reference to the economic vitality of the District's public conveniences. The review should include the current usage, the likely usage in the future, the quality and condition of those public conveniences and whether they are in the most appropriate locations and the cost. In the meantime, the Market Hall toilets would remain closed.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried.

Councillor Johnson addressed the Panel with some concerns regarding the provision of public toilets within Harborough District and the report presented at the Meeting. These are summarised below:

- the Panel did not have sufficiently-detailed costing information to be able to have an informed discussion about the provision of public toilets.
- the toilets in the Council Offices that are used by the public should not be classified as 'public conveniences' since they are not available for use seven days per week.
- the Council failed to adequately consult with the public prior to the closure of the St. Mary's Place, Market Harborough public toilets.
- the Council does not receive value for money for the toilet cleaning services it pays for.
- Great Bowden residents have suffered disproportionately to other residents as a result of recent changes: they now have to pay Special Expenses for using toilets in Market Harborough, yet they have lost the facilities in Great Bowden Recreation Ground.
- the loss of the St. Mary's Place, Market Harborough public toilets has a negative impact on the town's vibrant economic state.

Councillor Johnson circulated some pictures of Council-run public toilets.

The Panel NOTED that:

- (i) on the question of the adequacy of toilet facilities:
 - the Commons Car Park, Market Harborough toilets are adequate,
 - the Welland Park, Market Harborough toilets are in the right location but need work to bring them up to an acceptable standard.
 - the condition of the Little Bowden Recreation Ground toilets is not acceptable.
- (ii) it is difficult to predict future need for public toilets precipitated by possible population growth. It would be useful if predicted population growth figures were provided in future reports.
- (iii) The new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) may allow the Council to improve its public toilet provision via the planning system.

The Panel RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) exploratory dialogue with Great Bowden Parish Council reopen to discuss funding of the Great Bowden Recreation Ground toilets.
- (ii) exploratory dialogue with Broughton Astley Parish Council reopen to discuss funding of the public toilets in Broughton Astley.
- (iii) partnerships with local businesses should be considered as a means of providing additional public toilet provision.
- (iv) the Council should consult groups who have difficulty accessing public toilets to hear their concerns.
- (v) action should be taken to upgrade the Welland Park public toilets to bring them up to a standard that is in keeping with the other facilities in the park.
- (vi) the feasibility of charging for using public toilets should be investigated.
- (vii) the feasibility of installing self-cleaning, pay-for-use public toilets be investigated. A quotation for this would be useful for comparison purposes.
- (viii) further details of how depreciation of assets is calculated be provided to the Panel.
- (ix) a complete breakdown of public toilet costs be provided to the Panel. How 'Central Charges' for public toilets are calculated should be included in this information. The breakdown of costs should be site specific.

- (x) confirmation be provided to the Panel that where Special Expenses are used to pay for public toilets this provides for 100% of the cost.
- (xi) the report should come back to the Panel in December 2011. The revised report should include all of the issues raised above and up-to-date condition surveys and footfall analysis of the District's public toilets. A Briefing Note should be provided to the Panel after three months to advise them of progress.

The Meeting ended at 8.45p.m.