

HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held in the Council Chamber, The Symington Building,

Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough

3rd September 2015

commencing at 6.30 p.m.

Present: Councillor Dann, Chairman

Councillors: Mrs Ackerley, Bilbie, Brodrick, Mrs Burrell, Champion, Chapman, Elliott, Evans, Hammond, Modha, Nunn, Mrs Robinson, Rook, Mrs Simpson and Tomlin.

Officers: B. Jolly, S. Riley, & B. Murgatroyd

154 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dunton, Hall, Holyoak, Knowles, Rickman, Spendlove-Mason, and Wood.

155 MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMISSION

RESOLVED that: the Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held on 1st June 2015 be accepted and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

156 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were made in respect of Members' Interests.

157 REPORT 1: ELECTRONIC DESPATCH OF MEETING PAPERS

Members received a report regarding legislative changes which now permitted the sending of electronic summons and agendas for formal meetings. Previously, under Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972, it was a requirement that all summons and agendas for formal meetings of the council were posted to a Councillor's home address however the Local Authorities (Electronic Communications) (England) Order 2015 provides an option to send summons to an email address, which councillors can chose "opt in" to.

Currently all summonses and reports in relation to formal council meetings are sent to all Members of the relevant Committee, Sub-Committee or Scrutiny Panel by post. All papers relating to non-statutory meetings (i.e. Task Panels, Executive Advisory Panels etc.) are already circulated electronically with paper copies available at the meeting.

In 2014/14 the budget for postage to Members was £4,000 with actual spend totalling £2,752. The budget for printing for Members for the same period was £15,400 with actual spend amounting to £18,852.

The report advised that for the adoption of an electronic despatch system to be successful, the majority of Members would need to sign up to it. It would also necessitate a review of the Council's ICT Policy and potentially a review of access to documents at the meeting.

Results of the consultation undertaken with all Members revealed that of the 12 Members that responded, the majority indicated they would prefer to continue receiving paper copies of agenda and reports. Appendix A of the report contained detailed comments received as part of the consultation.

Members commented that papers were currently available electronically via the CMIS system and could be accessed on the council's website. However, it was remarked that if the despatch of electronic records were adopted then the current delays with Chromebook when logging in would make access more time-consuming. One suggestion made was to make greater use of the laptop screens in the chamber. Paper copies could still be available at the meeting for Members but CMIS be used to access documents for pre-meeting preparation.

One Member observed that a different approach may be necessary according to the meeting concerned and the associated volume of paperwork e.g. paper copies of reports and supporting documentation were more appropriate for the Planning Committee, however it was acknowledged that CMIS was suitable for short reports.

It was commented that currently Members could not receive paperwork via their personal email address, however Officers present explained that the council, along with all other local authorities, were signed up to the Code of Connection which prohibits the automatic forwarding of emails and documents. To forward emails manually would be too time-consuming.

One Member suggested sending a link to CMIS to members' personal emails, then members can access papers via CMIS.

Following discussion, the Commission RESOLVED to recommend the electronic despatch of documents to Full Council.

158 THE SCRUTINY WORK-PLAN

Following on from discussion and allocation of items not yet commissioned, the Scrutiny Commission RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Work-plan, attached at Appendix A to these Minutes, be approved.

159 OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE ROLE OF SCRUTINY

The Commission were asked to consider the future role, structure and operation of the Scrutiny function at Harborough District Council.

Since 2000, the decision making function at most local authorities has been undertaken by a Cabinet / Executive comprising of up to ten councillors. As part of establishing accountability to the decision making process, the Overview and Scrutiny function was introduced to positively challenge decisions made, in addition to enhancing evidence-based policy making.

At Harborough D.C. the Executive comprises of 6 Portfolio Members and following a review of the scrutiny function, the following structure was adopted by Full Council in 2012:-

The Scrutiny Commission (supported by a Steering Group comprising of the Scrutiny Commission Chairman and the Scrutiny Panel Chairpersons) oversees and allocates work to two Scrutiny Panels ('Community Leadership' and Resource & Performance'). 'Task and Finish' Groups are created, as and when required to undertake work.

The Commission were informed that the aim of Scrutiny is to improve service provision by supplying positive challenge to policy review and development, scrutinising decisions made by the Executive,

undertaking performance management and finally, providing external scrutiny via examination of services and the report raised the issue as to how these functions could be best delivered by Scrutiny.

The report contained details of scrutiny arrangements at local councils. Blaby District Council has an eighteen-member Scrutiny Commission with three themed working groups entitled 'Community Finance & Resources', 'Community & Partnership' and 'Performance'. North West Leicestershire Council has a single Scrutiny Committee (called the 'Policy Development Group') made up of ten non-Cabinet Members. Finally, Corby Borough Council has an Overview and Scrutiny Panel comprising of ten Members and up to three non-voting co-opted members which creates time limited 'Working Groups' as and when necessary.

After discussion, the Commission RESOLVED to establish a Scrutiny Task Group to review the scrutiny function at Harborough District Council and report back to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Commission.

The Meeting ended at 7.05 pm