

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCRUTINY COMMISSION FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES
HELD IN THE
BOURGES & VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH
ON 12 JANUARY 2015**

Present: Councillors Stokes (Chairman), Peach, Sanders, Harrington, Murphy, Okonkowski and J Fox.

Also Present: Councillor Peter Hiller Cabinet Member for Planning & Housing Services
Joe Dobson Independent Co-opted Member
Keith Leivesley Independent Co-opted Member

Officers in Attendance:

Cate Harding	Community Capacity Manager
Belinda Child	Head of Housing and Health Improvement
Adrian Chapman	Assistant Director for Communities and Targeted Services
Robin Sissons	Head of Safer, Stronger, Supportive Communities
Jonathan Lewis	Assistant Director for Education, Resources and Corporate Property
Jo Gresty	Farms Manager
Dania Castagliuolo	Democratic Services Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Brown, Councillor Peach attended as substitute. Apologies were also received from Councillor Sanders for the first item only. .

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

There were no declarations of interest

3. Minutes of the Previous Meetings Held on 17 November 2014

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2014, were approved as an accurate record.

4. Appointment of Co-opted Members

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which requested that the Commission considered appointing co-opted Members to the Commission. As per the constitution Part4, Section 8 – Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Commission Procedure Rules, Paragraph 3.

3.1 The Scrutiny Committee or Scrutiny Commissions shall be entitled to co-opt, as non-voting members, external representatives or otherwise invite participation from non-members where this is relevant to their work.

The Commission was asked to agree to the appointment of the following co-opted members:

- Keith Lievesley, Ufford Parish Council

- Joe Dobson, Helpston Parish Council
- Henry Clark, Peakirk Parish Council

ACTION AGREED

The Commission agreed to the appointment of the three co-opted members. Keith Lievesley and Joe Dobson joined the Commission for the remainder of the meeting as independent co-opted members. Henry Clark had given his apologies.

5. Strategy for the Retention and Development of the Farms Estate

The Assistant Director of for Education, Resources and Corporate Property introduced the report which presented the Commission with the draft Strategy for the Retention and Development of the Farms Estate.

The Commission was asked to review the proposed strategy and make comments and recommendations before the final version was agreed at the Sustainable Growth and Environment Capital Scrutiny Committee for presentation to Cabinet.

Observations and Questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members requested that the farms estate finances were briefly explained. *The Assistant Director for Education, Resources and Corporate Property responded that the Farms Estate was a very valuable asset to the Council and was worth 13 – 14m. The Farms Estate generated £300k per year. The Council was now looking in to how to maximise the income from the Estate. Over the years no investment in to the Estate had taken place. The Strategy was going to look at different ways of operating the Estate, using invest to save.*
- Members referred to page 15 of the report, Objective 1 “Sale of property which is genuinely surplus to the opening requirements of the estate or which are not financially viable to retain” and queried whether this referred solely to farmland or to the combining of the estate. *The Farms Manager responded that in some cases when dwellings were vacated and not viable to retain, this would be an opportunity to sell the assets. The Assistant Director for Education, Resources and Corporate Property added that would also be an opportunity for the Council use these assets in different ways to generate income.*
- Councillor Harrington who was a member of the working group which developed the draft strategy thanked all who had contributed to the development of the draft strategy.
- Members commented that the whole process leading up to the development of the strategy helped to regain the trust of the tenant Farmers.
- Members commented that they were pleased that the Council had recognised the value of the estate and it was important to keep agriculture in Peterborough.
- Members referred to page 18 of the report, part d) Retirement of Farm Tenants. They were concerned regarding the retirement age of farm tenants being 65 as lots of farmers carried on working well in to their 70's. *The Farms Manager responded that this would not affect the tenant's contract and the Council would always accommodate a tenant where it could.*
- Councillor Murphy who was part of the Task and Finish group added that he found the work of the group fascinating from a cultural and historical point of view.
- Members felt this strategy could also be valuable for inclusion within the Rural Vision and Strategy.

ACTION AGREED

The Committee noted the report and agreed the Strategy for the Retention of the Farms Estate.

At this point Councillor Sanders joined the meeting.

6. Developing a Rural Vision and Parish Charter for Peterborough

The Community Capacity Manager introduced the report which outlined the history and new approach for a refresh of the Rural Vision document, which was originally prepared in 2008.

The Commission was asked to:

- (i) Agree the framework around which the Rural Vision and Parish Charter for Peterborough would be developed.
- (ii) Agree the draft general content of the Rural Vision in line with common themes and current activities within the Community Serve Programme which supported the role, functions and priorities of rural Parish Councils.

Observations and Questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members queried whether the final version of the document would include specifics around inequalities, such as Community Capacity, housing, geography and employment opportunities. *The Community Capacity Manager responded that an action plan would be produced which included performance indicators to support the final vision document.*
- Members expressed concern with the transferring of assets over to Parish Councils, as they would be heavily reliant on Parish Precepts. This would limit the potential to carry out work or hold public events.
- Members were concerned with the lack of affordable housing in rural communities and suggested that something was included within the Rural Vision to encourage young people to remain or invest in rural areas. *Members were advised that these ideas would be noted for inclusion within the Rural Vision.*
- Members commented that it was crucial that Parish Councils had support from Peterborough City Council, in order for them to make the best contributions to their villages. *Members were advised that more expectations were being put upon Parish Councils and Peterborough City Council were keen to offer support and look in to how Parish Councils could be commissioned to deliver services. There would also be additional support for Parish Councils with community led planning.*
- *The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Services advised the Commission that the National Planning Policy Framework determined the ability for Parish Councils to have rural exception sites. This referred to land which would not usually be considered for development. This land could be used for affordable housing. He also advised Members that the decision on where to include affordable housing was not made by the Planning Committee, it was made by the developers.*

ACTION AGREED

The Commission noted the report and agreed to the following recommendation:

- (i) Agree the framework around which the Rural Vision and Parish Charter for Peterborough will be developed and implemented.

RECOMMENDATION

The Commission recommended to the Assistant Director for Communities and Targeted Services that a special focus was contained within the Rural Vision around liveability, including the following subjects:

- Housing
- Transport
- Employment
- Connectivity

7. Keeping Rural Communities Safe

The report was introduced by the Head of Safer, Stronger and Supportive Communities, which provided Members with an overview of the activities which were being and could be delivered in the rural areas of Peterborough, to ensure that crime levels within the rural communities remained relatively low. The report described which activities were already in existence and explored some sustainable alternatives which would maintain safety and confidence in rural communities, with a more local focus within a very challenging financial landscape.

The Commission was asked to scrutinise the report, prioritise the schemes contained within the report and identify alternative schemes.

The sustainable schemes for the Commission to consider were as follows:

- Rural Watch Patrols
- Rural Volunteers
- Rural Community Investigators
- Rural Specials
- Employers Specials Scheme (ESP)
- Neighbourhood Warden Schemes
- Street Leaders
- Neighbourhood Watch
- Utilisation of existing community groups
- Regular Updates

Observations and Questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members expressed concern with Neighbourhood Watch not being very successful in villages due to lack of membership and suggested it may be more appealing if it was called Rural Watch. *The Head of Safer, Stronger and Supportive Communities responded that a similar scheme had been proposed within the report on page 31, part 4.2.1, called Rural Watch Patrols.*
- *The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Services commented that the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme was extremely active in some villages and suggested it would be useful to get some tips from the successful groups.*
- Members commented that they had been presented with a very good and informative report and queried whether the Council currently employed a Wildlife Officer. *The Head of Safer, Stronger and Supportive Communities responded that the Council had a rural crime team which included a Wildlife Officer.*
- Members queried whether environmental issues were a priority for the police in rural areas. *Members were advised that environmental crime, like all crimes, had to be prioritised. The Council were currently encouraging communities to become involved in issues as the police were working increasingly with intelligence.*

- Members commented that people from rural communities were lacking a dedicated contact to build up their trust with the police. Rural communities were no longer reporting incidents as they did not receive a quick response from the police.
- Members commented that they would like to see more resources being put in to rural communities and were concerned that to employ any of the schemes stated within the report, something important would have to be removed. *Members were informed that all of the schemes would be run on a voluntary basis.*
- Members suggested that the schemes were delivered through the support of Parish Councils.
- Members referred to page 32 of the report, part 4.2.5 and queried whether the Employers Special Scheme (ESP) worked, as not many companies could afford to let their employees have time off work. *Members were advised that this did work because employers would receive a far more skilled employee.*

ACTION AGREED

The Commission noted the Report.

RECOMMENDATION

The Commission recommended to the Head of Safer, Stronger and Supportive Communities that a letter was written, on behalf of the Commission, to the two local MP's to raise the issue at a national level regarding villages not having a local point of contact relating to crime and community safety.

8. Forward Plan of Executive Decisions

The Commission received the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan of Executive Decisions, which contained key decisions that the Leader of the Council anticipated the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would make during the course of the forthcoming month. Members were invited to comment on the Plan and, where appropriate, identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Commission's work programme.

ACTION AGREED

The Commission noted the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decision and requested further information on the following decisions:

- Extension to the Public Health Services Contract
- Future of Solar and Wind Projects
- The Mobile Homes Act 2013 Fees Policy
- Residential Care

6. Work Programme

Members considered the Commission's Work Programme for 2014/15 and discussed possible items for inclusion.

AGREED ACTION

The Commission noted and agreed the 2014/2015 work programme.

7. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday, 16 March 2015.

The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 9.00pm

CHAIRMAN