



**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCRUTINY COMMISSION FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES
HELD IN
THE BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOM, TOWN HALL
ON 28 NOVEMBER 2016**

Present: Councillors D Over (Chairman), R Brown (Vice Chairman),
S Allen, H Fuller, J Okonkowski

Also Present:

Joe Dobson	Independent Co-opted Member
Keith Lievesley	Independent Co-opted Member
Philip Nuttall	Independent Co-opted Member
Councillor Walsh	Cabinet Member for Communities and Environment Capital
Raymond Wood	Thorney Parish Council
John Bartlett	Thorney Parish Council
Councillor June Bull	Orton Longueville Parish Council
Neil Boyce	Caster Parish Council
Councillor Sylvester	
Dawn Clipston	Newborough and Borough Fen Parish Council
Richard Clarke	Wansford Parish Council
Susie Lucas	Ashton and Bainton Parish Council
Carol Fuller	Deeping Gate Parish Council

Officers Present:

Kim Sawyer	Director of Governance
Colin Arnold	IT Manager
Adrian Chapman	Service Director, Adult Social Care and Communities
Paulina Ford	Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Fower, Councillor J R Fox and Councillor Whitby. Councillor Okonkowski was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Whitby. Apologies were also received from Henry Clark, Co-opted Member.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

There were no declarations of interest or whipping declarations.

3. Minutes of Meeting held on 6 September 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2016 were approved as an accurate record.

4. Arrangements for Rural Scrutiny

The Director of Governance introduced the report. The purpose of the report was to ensure that the existing workload of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities was allocated to an appropriate Committee within the new Scrutiny structure which had been agreed at Council on 12 October 2016 and to discuss proposed new arrangements for scrutiny of rural issues in the absence of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Environment who was also in attendance informed the Committee that under the new Scrutiny arrangements there was a proposal to have at least one Parish Councillor representing the rural area on each Scrutiny Committee as a non-voting Co-opted Member. It was proposed that a process be put in place whereby anyone interested in becoming a Parish Council representative on a Scrutiny Committee could submit a short biography and at the next Parish Council Liaison meeting held on 21 December 2016 it would be decided who those Co-opted Members would be and which Scrutiny Committee they would be placed on.

Members of the Parish Council Liaison had been invited to the meeting and were in attendance to provide input into the discussion.

Comments, observations and key issues raised are summarised as follows:

- Clarification was sought around the selection of Parish Council Co-opted Members by the Parish Council Liaison. Members were informed that the Parish Council Liaison meeting would put forward a recommended member for each Scrutiny Committee to be agreed upon by each Scrutiny Committee. Each proposal would be based on the biography put forward and knowledge of the candidate. Each nomination would be assessed on their commitment to the rural element and whether they possessed the necessary skill set for the remit of the Scrutiny Committee that they were being nominated to. The nominations would also be members of the Parish Council Liaison to ensure that discussions held at scrutiny meetings were fed back to the Parish Council Liaison. There would therefore be one substantive co-opted member guaranteed with a substitute.
- Parish Councillors present felt that two Parish Councillor Co-opted Members per Committee would provide a wider skillset and ensure both urban and rural perspectives were represented, however it was noted that this would be at the discretion of each Scrutiny Committee whether a second Parish Councillor would be accepted as a Co-opted Member.
- The new arrangements would provide an opportunity to increase engagement between Parish Council Liaison and Scrutiny.
- A suggestion was put forward to nominate two candidates for each of the Scrutiny Committees and in particular the Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee as it was felt that this committee had the majority of rural issues.
- It was felt that the recent letter circulated regarding the new scrutiny arrangements implied that the decision regarding who should be Co-opted Members had been made.
- Clarification was sought as to whether Co-opted Members could have voting rights. The Director of Governance advised that co-opted members were not allowed voting rights by law.
- Concerns were raised that rural representation may be diminished within Peterborough City Council under the new arrangements.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Environment, Councillor Walsh and the Director of Governance, Kim Sawyer responded to comments and questions raised. In summary responses included:

- Parish Council Liaison members would be placed at the heart of the decision making process and have a voice within under the new arrangements.
- The Council was moving towards a new way of working within a new scrutiny structure. The Committee Review Group felt that the Scrutiny Committees should have as wider remit as possible to select their own Co-opted Members. It was therefore decided that there should be only one reserved place for a Parish Council Co-opted Member to represent the rural area and then each committee would have the opportunity to select an additional Parish Council Co-opted Member if they so wished.
- Dependent on the number of expressions of interest put forward it was hoped that the Parish Council Liaison could put forward a proposal to each Scrutiny Committee that an additional Parish Council member be co-opted. The minimum number of Co-opted Members from Parish Council Liaison onto the Scrutiny Committees would be four with a possibility of up to eight should the Scrutiny Committees agree to the second Co-optee.
- The number of members per Scrutiny Committee was decided by Council. Proposals could be made to Council for an amendment to modify the number which would then be debated and voted upon at Full Council.
- Each scrutiny committee had 11 councillors and was proportionally represented to reflect the makeup of the Council.

The Chairman sought agreement to the following recommendations:

- (a) there should be one non-voting seat on each committee reserved to a Parish Council member or their substitute
- (b) that the scrutiny committee can invite a further Parish Council member to become a non-voting co-opted member
- (c) the annual work programme of the Scrutiny Committees must take account of matters which affect the rural area.

Councillor Fuller seconded by Councillor Okonkowski proposed an amendment to the following recommendation: a) there should be one non-voting seat on each committee reserved to a Parish Council member or their substitute. It was proposed that it should be changed to specify a Rural Parish Council member. Following a vote (5 in favour 0 against, 0 abstentions), the amendment was **AGREED**.

Keith Lievesley, Co-opted Member suggested that recommendation a) and recommendation b) be merged and that it should read as follows: there should be two non-voting seats on the each committee reserved to a rural Parish Council member and an urban Parish Council member. Councillor Okonkowski put forward the proposed recommendation on behalf of Keith Lievesley but was not seconded and therefore the recommendation was not voted upon.

Recommendation b) that the scrutiny committee can invite a further Parish Council Member to become a non-voting Co-opted Member and recommendation c) the annual work programme of the Scrutiny Committees must take account of matters which affect the rural area were unanimously **AGREED**.

The Chairman sought legal advice with regard to a further recommendation which would propose that the Parish Council Liaison decide on which Parish Councillors to put forward as Co-opted Members for each Scrutiny committee. The Chairman was advised that the proposal could be put forward but it would be for Full Council to agree the new arrangements.

Councillor Allen seconded by Councillor Fuller proposed that a further recommendation be added which was that the Parish Council Liaison decide on which Parish Councillors to put forward as Co-opted Members for each Scrutiny Committee. The recommendation was unanimously **AGREED**.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission agreed to endorse the proposals of the Committee Review Group, which will be presented to Full Council on 14 December and that the scrutiny procedure rules include the following provisions:

1. That there should be one non-voting seat on each committee reserved to a Rural Parish Council member or their substitute
2. That the Scrutiny Committee can invite a further Parish Council member to become a non-voting Co-opted Member
3. That the annual work programme of the Scrutiny Committees must take account of matters which affect the rural area.
4. That the Parish Council Liaison Committee decide on which Parish Councillors to put forward as Co-opted Members for each Scrutiny Committee.

At this point the Parish Council Liaison members in attendance left the meeting.

5. Digital Connectivity of Parish Councils and Rural Community Facilities

The report was introduced by the IT Manager which provided the Committee with an update on the initiatives being investigated to support Parish Councils with their Digital Agenda and to ensure that community facilities across the city were digitally connected and able to operate as vital community serve points.

The IT Manager responded to comments and questions raised. In summary responses included:

- Any web hosting or data storage would have to comply with stringent security and the IT department would be able to offer advice and best practice on this.
- Members commented that there were still some areas of rural Peterborough that did not have high speed broadband. The IT Manager agreed to find out which areas were affected.
- The web content would be controlled by the Parish Council and contributions by the public would not be vetted.
- Members sought clarification as to whether Parish Councils could have a dedicated area on the Peterborough City Council website. This would enable Parish Councils to communicate more effectively with each other and create forums.
- It was noted that some people now preferred to use Facebook over websites and the use of Facebook should be part of the discussions included in the working party. The use of Snapchat was also discussed.
- Parish Council's use of a .gov email address would also be investigated through the working group.
- Members suggested that there should be a base line put in place for things like data security and all Parish Councils should adhere to this.
- A pilot project could be put in place to work jointly with Parish Councils to trial some quick successes like data security and email addresses.

The next step was to establish a working group to take the initiative forward to a fully costed proposal which would include the appointment of a suitably qualified Project Manager if funding was available. The working group would consist primarily of Parish Council Members, City Council Staff and Partners.

ACTION

The Committee noted the report and requested that the IT Manager investigate the following:

1. To obtain information regarding Parish Council's using an email address ending .gov.
2. To identify which areas of rural Peterborough do not have high speed broadband.

RECOMMENDATION

The Commission noted the report and agreed to the formation of a project working group to continue the initiative. This group to be primarily made up of Parish Council members, City Council Staff and Partners.

6. Forward Plan of Executive Decisions

The Commission received the latest version of the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions, containing key decisions that the Leader of the Council anticipated the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would make during the course of the following month. Members were invited to comment on the Forward Plan and where appropriate identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's work programme. No discussion followed.

AGREED ACTION

The Commission noted the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions.

This being the last meeting of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities the Chairman thanked members of the Commission and Co-opted Members for their valuable input over the past year.

The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 8.35pm.

CHAIRMAN

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